An investigation of Chen Chong Swee' s practical colour application on selected paintings

Goh, Huiying

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**NANYANG
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SINGAPORE

**AN INVESTIGATION OF CHEN CHONG SWEE'S PRACTICAL COLOUR
APPLICATION ON SELECTED PAINTINGS**

GOH HUIYING

SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN AND MEDIA

2020

**AN INVESTIGATION OF CHEN CHONG SWEE'S PRACTICAL COLOUR
APPLICATION ON SELECTED PAINTINGS**

GOH HUIYING

School of Art, Design and Media

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts (Research)

2020

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I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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This thesis **does not** contain any materials from papers published in peer-reviewed journals or from papers accepted at conferences in which I am listed as an author.

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Abstract

This research investigates the practical colour application used in the selected paintings of Singapore pioneer artist Chen Chong Swee. There is a lack of extensive research on Nanyang paintings as much of the current existing literature focuses on the definition of Nanyang style, neglecting the formal articulation of the artwork itself. The artist-researcher/author makes use of histogram charts and 3D Munsell colour space generators to analyse how colours were used in the selected paintings. Formal and content analysis of Chen Chong Swee's paintings, writings and biography are conducted to provide social and cultural contexts behind the creation of these paintings. Part of the practical component consists of re-enacted painting processes, colour palettes and experimental studies to explore the strengths and limitations of each medium. Over the years, Chen mastered colour mixing and understood the three qualities of colours: hue, chroma and value. This mastery of colours equipped him with the capability to create communicable imageries that reflect the realities of the Southsea.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Nanyang paintings have been extensively studied, but there is a lack of literature on the use of colours within these paintings. There is an ongoing debate on what defined Nanyang style and who can be considered as Nanyang artists, without having a good visual explanation on what exactly constitutes the *Nanyang* style. This research will like to use Chen Chong Swee as the point of reference to do an in-depth analysis of Nanyang paintings and examine Chen's usage of colours in his paintings. Chen will be the driving force to induce further findings on the practical colour application in Nanyang paintings— the blend of School of Paris and Chinese traditions.

Nanyang, which is literally translated as “South seas”, refers to the island nations that are situated at the south of China. It is primarily a geographic term used by the Chinese traders for countries such as Singapore, the Malayan Peninsula, the Indonesian Archipelago, Philippines and the southern part of Thailand. Professor Wang Gungwu pointed out that although the historical term “Nanyang” had been replaced by the modern term “Southeast Asia”, the term “Nanyang” had the meaning of travelling out of China via the Southern Ocean (Southern China Sea).¹ He defined Nanyang Chinese as immigrants who travelled out of China via the sea route and excluded Chinese immigrants who travelled and moved to Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand via the land route. In the literary circle, the term Nanyang was commonly used on just Singapore and Malaya.²

¹ Gungwu Wang, *A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese* (Singapore: Published by D. Moore for Eastern University Press, 1959).

² Mang Thong Yeo and Kwee Horng Foo, "Discursive Reflections- Explicating the Pre-War Artworks of Chen Chong Swee and the Definitions of Nanyang Art," in *Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee*, ed. Sze Wee Low and Heng Cai (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2017).

Nanyang style, Nanyang school and Nanyang movement are terms deciphered by the art critiques and art historians, to classify artworks that used the styles and techniques from the Chinese pictorial tradition and the School of Paris, created by an emigrated artist on local subject matter.³ Nanyang artist is commonly defined as a new immigrant artist who received Western art training in either Shanghai or Paris and integrated Chinese painting traditions in his or her artwork based on a local subject. Commonly named Nanyang artists are the Bali-fours: Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen-Hsi and Chen Chong Swee, who embarked to a one-month sketching trip to Bali in 1952.⁴ Other Nanyang artists include Georgette Chen Liying and Lim Cheng Hoe. As most of them were teachers in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), a local art school which followed the Beaux-Arts model, the Nanyang artists were often associated with NAFA.⁵

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, colour is defined as “the sensation produced on the eye by rays of light when resolved into different wavelengths, as by a prism, selective reflection etc.”⁶ In the discussion of colour theories in visual arts, there are three aspects namely: colour visual effects (e.g. the theory of simultaneous contrast), colour mixing (e.g. when complementary colours are mixed, the result is neutral grey), and 3d colour space (e.g. three qualities in colours: hue, value and chroma). In practice, these aspects of colours impact how artists use and select colours, which are often dependent on the objective of the visual presentation of their artwork. Practical colour application refers to the selection, usage and mixing of colours in a work of art. With the exceptions of artists who read about the science

³ T.K. Sabapathy, “The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks,” in *Writing the Modern: Selected Texts on Art & Art History in Singapore, Malaysia & Southeast Asia, 1973-2015* (Singapore Art Museum, 2018). Pg 340-345. First published in T. K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa, *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis-Pelukis Nanyang* (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia, 1979).

⁴ “Bali- by 4 Chinese Artists,” *The Straits Times*, 10 November 1953.

⁵ Redza Piyadasa, “The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts,” in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis-Pelukis Nanyang* (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia, 1979).

⁶ J. A. Simpson, E. S. C. Weiner, and Press Oxford University, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford; Oxford: Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2001). Pg 286

behind colour theories, “colour theory” to artists generally do not include the complex scientific characterisation of colours. More than often, colour theories are misunderstood as presets of colour combinations which are preferred by the human eye. This interpretation of colour theories is inaccurate. The study of colour theories in visual arts is not to seek the best colour combination. Moreover, the current research on colour harmony and human preference has been inconclusive. Colour preference is dependent on the biological, cultural and social context of individual or group,⁷ which is a different field of research. Lastly, the same term “colour theory” is also used in colour science and colour specification system, which are not relevant in this investigation. The discussion of colour theory is divided into three broad umbrellas: colour science (such as colour vision and colourimetry), colour specification system (industry applications such as CIE, Munsell, NCS and Pantone), and practical colour application in artworks (in visual arts and education).⁸

This research adapts the conceptual framework of a practice-led research. Practice-led research shares similar research design as other art and humanities research on the identification of research questions and problems, but has a significant focus on the creative practice.⁹ It combines the ‘systematic and rigorous qualities of scientific inquiry with the artistic and imaginative qualities of the arts’.¹⁰ This research attempts to understand Chen Chong Swee’s paintings with the author as the artist-researcher¹¹ to interpret his use of colours and practical colour application on the selected paintings. The author identifies with an interpretive framework based on pragmatic approach.¹² Within this framework, the researcher has the

⁷ Anya Hurlbert et al., "Biological, Cultural, and Developmental Influences on Color Preferences," (2015).

⁸ For more information on colour theory and how it is used in different areas, see George A. Agoston, "Color Theory and Its Application in Art and Design," (2013).

⁹ Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (SAGE Publications, 2005). Pg. 10-11

¹¹ Refer to Appendix 1.1 for the biography and portfolio of the artist-researcher/author.

¹² David L. Morgan, *Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: A Pragmatic Approach* (SAGE Publications, 2013). Pg. 42

freedom to choose the methods, techniques and procedures, whichever best meet the needs of the study. This study implements a qualitative research design where qualitative methods such as open-ended interviewing and content analysis of published books, exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles are used. Quantitative methods such as the generation of histogram and 3D Munsell colour space are used to provide image information and data. The practical component has two parts. Practical Component A consists of experimental studies on the mixing of colours, re-enactment of the painting process and the identification of the properties of various painting tools and medium. Practical Component B consists of 8 paintings done with Chen Chong Swee's teachings and art beliefs. The introduction segment adapts the approach as suggested by Creswell¹³ where the research problem, research questions and purpose statement are identified and elaborated. In the writing of this paper, for easier comprehension, the official English names of the local Chinese are used in place of *hanyu pinyin* (Figure 1.1).

Official English name	Chinese characters	<i>Hanyu pinyin</i> name
Chen Chong Swee	陈宗瑞	Chen Zong Rui
Chen Wen-Hsi	陈文希	Chen Wen Xi
Cheong Soo Pieng	钟泗滨	Zhong Si Bin
Georgette Chen	张荔瑛	Zhang Li Ying
Lim Cheng Hoe	林清河	Lin Qing He
Yeo Mang Thong	姚梦桐	Yao Meng Tong
Marco Hsu	玛戈	Ma Ge

Figure 1.1 Names of local Chinese in their official English spelling, Chinese characters and *hanyu pinyin* names

For standardisation, the *hanyu pinyin* name are used for the names of other Chinese figures in this paper. For example, Xie He (谢赫) is used in place of the widely used Wade-Giles

¹³ J.W. Creswell and C.N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design (International Student Edition): Choosing among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2017). Pg 26-27

romanisation name Hsieh Ho. This is because not all Chinese figures who are mentioned in this paper has a Wade-Giles romanisation name.

Selection criteria for case study artist Chen Chong Swee

Chen Chong Swee has a significant body of artwork that consists of watercolour, oil and Chinese paintings which reflect a blend of Chinese tradition and Western painting techniques. He is a good representative of Nanyang artist who was born in China, educated in formal Chinese education and studied in the Xinhua Academy of Fine Art in Shanghai before resettling in Malaya in 1932. As an art educator and active leader of art societies such as the Society of Chinese Artists, Singapore Watercolour Society and Singapore Art Society, Chen wrote many articles on exhibition foreword and alumni magazines. These writings provide a good overview of the local art scene and his thoughts about art. There is also a significant amount of sketchbooks which are accessible from the National Gallery Archives. These materials serve as a good source of reference to understand Chen's creative process, artistic intention and art beliefs.

Among his peers, Chen Chong Swee is the most suitable candidate as the case study artist. His contemporary Cheong Soo Pieng, who also reflected a strong blend of Chinese traditions and Western painting techniques in his artwork, had shown a robust stylistic input in his artwork. However, in a research that investigates the relationship between the use of colours and geographical location, Cheong Soo Pieng's paintings might be too stylistic and did not reflect the lighting and weather condition of the location accurately.¹⁴ Chen Chong Swee's paintings on the other hand, are representational works of art that render the subject matter

¹⁴ For further reading on Cheong Soo Pieng's paintings, see Wei Wei Yeo et al., *Cheong Soo Pieng : Visions of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: The National Art Gallery, 2010).

realistically. He believes that 'art is a part of life and cannot exist independently from real life'.¹⁵ A good piece of art has to capture the essence of universality and embody the truth, goodness and beauty. In this study where the geographical location is one of the examination factors, an artist who paints true to real-life like Chen Chong Swee will be the most suitable case study candidate. Lim Cheng Hoe, another prominent pioneer artist, also captured realistic lighting conditions in his watercolour landscape paintings. Lim however, paints predominantly in Western painting medium watercolour and had shown no Chinese traditions in his paintings.¹⁶ The scope of research may be relatively limited to the use of colours within the watercolour medium. By choosing Chen Chong Swee, who paints in watercolour, oil and Chinese ink, as the case study artist, the research question can be expanded to also understand the strengths and limitations of different painting mediums.

¹⁵ *Chen Chong Swee : A Legacy in Truth Goodness and Beauty : An Exhibition and Publication That Commemorates the Centenary of the Artist's Birth*, (Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 2010). Pg 13

¹⁶ For further readings on Lim Cheng Hoe, see Sze Wee Low, *Lim Cheng Hoe. Painting Singapore* (National Gallery Singapore, 2018).

1.1 Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to investigate how colours are used in Nanyang paintings. Literature review on the writing of Nanyang style has been conducted to provide the basis of the formulation of the research questions. The practical knowledge of the artist-researcher will be used to examine the colour application, construction of the pictorial composition, drawing and painting techniques used in the selected paintings. This research examines the paintings of one of the significant pioneer artists in Singapore— Chen Chong Swee, through a close examination of the selected paintings, writings and sketchbooks. In the process of the resettlement, what has affected Chen's usage of colours? How has the colours in Chen's paintings changed over the years? The following are research questions that guide the enquiry:

1. How has the use of colours in Chen Chong Swee's paintings developed and changed after his resettlement in Malaya in 1932?
 - i) Following up from question 1, how has the geographic location of Singapore and the change in subject matter affected Chen Chong Swee's usage of colours?
 - ii) How has Chen Chong Swee's training in Western painting influenced the way he did his Chinese paintings, and vice versa?
 - iii) How has the medium (Chinese painting, watercolour or oil) impacted Chen Chong Swee's painting process and/or impacted the result of the painting?

1.2 Research Methodology

In the attempt to understand the Nanyang artists' usage of colours, an entire chapter is allocated for the case study of paintings by the selected artist. Given the limit of this thesis and the intention to do an in-depth analysis of the selected paintings, the scope of the research is narrowed to 14 paintings by a singular Nanyang artist. This study investigates the following three perspectives: the intention of the artist, the creative process of painting and the intended audience's perception (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 A sketch of the research methodology and methods

This research uses a qualitative research design with quantitative data generation as a supportive tool. The thesis identifies the intention of the artist with qualitative method of open-

ended interviewing with living artists who had painted alongside with Chen Chong Swee. Content analysis of the writings and sketchbooks by Chen Chong Swee is carried out to understand the art beliefs behind his practices. Experimental intervention of colour mixing is conducted to examine the painting process by the artist-researcher. In-depth formal analysis of the paintings is conducted to find out the perception of the audience.

Quantitative methods	Qualitative methods	Practice-led research methods
3D Munsell colour space	Content analysis	Author as artist-researcher
Histogram	Open-ended interviewing	Re-enactment of painting process
-	Formal analysis	Experimental intervention of colour mixing

Figure 1.3 Qualitative research design

Methods

The first part of the investigation consists of three chapters which provide the contextual study required in this research: Nanyang, colour theories of the West, and the concept of colours in Chinese painting. For the second part of the investigation, an in-depth case study will be conducted to investigate Chen Chong Swee's practical colour application on the selected paintings. As Chen Chong Swee passed away in 1985, his writings and articles written about him are the direct sources to gain hindsight of the intention behind his paintings. By speaking to artists who had painted alongside with Chen, it provided glimpses of his painting habits and practices which may lead to the answers of the research questions. In the case study chapter, the following methods are used to provide context and to conduct close examination of Chen Chong Swee's paintings:

1. Content analysis

- a. Published books and articles written by Chen Chong Swee
- b. Chen Chong Swee archives from the National Gallery Singapore which included Chen's sketchbooks and photo references
- c. Newspaper articles and photographs from NewspaperSG and National Archives of Singapore to better understand the social and cultural context in the 1930s-80s
- d. Past exhibition catalogues of the Society of Chinese Artists, Singapore Watercolour Society and Singapore Art Society
- e. Books and articles written about Chen Chong Swee by writers such as T.K. Sabapathy, Kwok Kian Chow, Bridget Tracy Tan, Yeo Mang Thong

2. Open-ended interviewing:

- a. Living artists who had painted or worked with Chen Chong Swee in art societies i.e. Loy Chye Chuan, Low Puay Hua
- b. Curators and gallery owners i.e. Choy Weng Yang, Seng Yu Jin, Michelle Loh
- c. Art store owners from Straits Art Co, Sibaozai i.e. Clara Wong, Ms Xie

A face to face interview with open-ended conversation. Qualitative method of open-ended interviewing is adapted for this study.

3. Formal analysis:

- a. In-depth analysis of the form and style used in the selected paintings by Chen Chong Swee. Formal elements included the use of colours (e.g. hue, value, chroma), pictorial composition (e.g. line, space, design and placement), drawing

techniques (e.g. shape and form) and painting techniques (e.g. brushwork, texture).¹⁷

4. Image data analysis:

- a. An internal school software that generates the 3D Munsell colour space of the input image
- b. An online free histogram generator that calculates the luminance level of the input image

5. Author as artist-researcher:

- a. Re-enactment of the painting and colour application process of the selected painting to investigate the techniques used by Chen Chong Swee
- b. Experimental intervention of colour mixing to examine Chen's use of colours
- c. Analysis of the anatomy drawing and painting techniques

Selection criteria of the case study paintings

To find out the practical colour application and how has the use of colours in Chen Chong Swee's paintings evolved over the years, 14 paintings are selected. The selection is based on the date, medium, suitability in representing the practical colour application of the period, and the applicability in addressing the colour problem. A varied selection of paintings from the 1930s to 1980s are selected to represent the entire body of work in Chen Chong Swee's life. Paintings done in various mediums are selected to enable the investigation of the strength and limitations of different painting tools and materials. Black and white Chinese ink paintings are excluded from the selection because they only have one out of the three qualities of colours

¹⁷ Methods of formal analysis referenced from Sylvan Barnet, "A Short Guide to Writing About Art," (2015).

(hue, value and chroma). The majority of the selection are paintings with good pictorial composition, accurate construction of forms and clear storytelling. While the rest are selected to demonstrate unsuccessful painting techniques or disjointed colour mixing. A mixture of subject matter such as portraiture, landscape and still-life had been selected to provide a balanced examination of Chen Chong Swee's paintings.

To prevent inconsistency caused by the colour correction and printing issues from the publisher, all 14 paintings are from one book *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*.¹⁸ The book not only had good coverage of Chen Chong Swee's body of work from the 1930-80s but also retained high colour accuracy of the original paintings in its printing process. During the preproduction photography session, a colour checker was placed beside each painting which allowed accurate colour correction in postproduction and printing.¹⁹ Other Chen Chong Swee's art books such as *The Paintings of Chen Chong Swee*²⁰ and *Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee*²¹ had good coverage on Chen's oeuvre, but the printing and image colour correction was not consistent. Image accuracy and consistency are important factors to be taken into consideration, because this thesis uses mathematical-based image calculation software in the case study chapter to analyse the usage of colours in the selected paintings.

¹⁸ Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts NAFA, *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty* (Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 2011).

¹⁹ Images of colour checker and original paintings can be found in National Gallery Archives, Chen Chong Swee/RC-S1-CCS1.MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS COLLECTED FOR RESEARCH/Artwork images from CCS exhn at NAFA 23 Dec 10 to 16 Jan 2011/. Accessed on 12 December 2018.

²⁰ Zongrui Chen, *Chen Zongrui Cai Mo Hua Ji = the Paintings of Chen Chong Swee* (Singapore: Nan feng mei shu she, 1983).

²¹ Zongrui Chen et al., *Chen Chong Swee : Strokes of Life : The Art of Chen Chong Swee = Chen Zongrui : Sheng Ji Chu Bi Duan : Chen Zongrui Yi Shu Te Zhan* (2017).

Practical Component A+B

Practical Component A is integrated in the case study chapter on the investigation of the practical colour application on selected paintings by Chen Chong Swee. They consists of experimental studies of the tools and materials used in various mediums, and the re-enactment of the painting processes and colour palettes. The artist-researcher/author makes use of a practitioner's experience in traditional paintings to investigate Chen's practical colour application.

Practical Component B consists of 8 paintings done by the artist-researcher/author. These paintings are done with ideas drawn from Chen Chong Swee's art belief that "art is a product of its time"²² and there are no restrictions in mixing both Western and Chinese painting techniques. 4 watercolour paintings of Singapore's street scene and Shantou, China's sceneries were done 60% on location, and the remaining are completed in studio with photo references. The only oil painting is done in the studio with photo references taken during a personal trip to Tibet. The light and shadows of the Western paintings are carefully crafted, and they captured the unique weather and colours of the location. The 3 Chinese ink paintings seek to record the artist-researcher's personal living experience in Singapore.

²² Zongrui Chen et al., *Unfettered Ink : The Writings of Chen Chong Swee = Miao Bi Dan Qing : Chen Zhongrui Wen Ji 妙笔丹青: 陈宗瑞文集* (2017). Pg 89

1.3 Challenges and Possible Problems

In order to get a fair comparison, the colour temperature, black and white levels of the input image have to be as accurate as possible. Careful measures have been carried out to ensure the consistency and accuracy of colours. All the selected paintings used in the case study chapter are from the same printed book and digitalised using the same scanner. It is important to note that the discussion of the concept of colour application is based on a relative difference, not on absolute value. For example, the relative comparison of the colour yellow and blue where yellow is lighter than blue. Colour is a perception and it exists in the mind of the viewer.²³ It is not possible to observe if one sees red the same as the other. Also, the human eye's perception is not consistent and it differs from one person to another. A research done by Michael Webster on individual differences on colour vision has shown that human eyes have slight individual differences and colour deficiencies do occur with ageing.²⁴ Hence, in a case of slight inaccuracy in the colours of the image of selected paintings has been taken into account, so it would not cause a significant problem in the investigation.

²³ *Handbook of Color Psychology*, Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Pg xxi.

²⁴ A. Webster Michael, "Individual Differences in Color Vision," in *Handbook of Color Psychology*, ed. Andrew J. Elliot, Mark D. Fairchild, and Anna Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO: NANYANG

2.1 Who are the Nanyang artists? What is Nanyang style?

To understand the context behind the debate of Nanyang style and case study artist Chen Chong Swee, the following chapter introduced the Nanyang artists, followed by a literature review of the existing writings on Nanyang style.

The undefined margin on who are the Nanyang artists

The identification of Nanyang artists was often confusing and contradicting, given that both terms were not called upon by artists but were deciphered by the art critiques and art historians. Firstly, if Nanyang artists consisted of teachers and students from NAFA, then Liu Kang and Lim Cheng Hoe, who were not affiliated to NAFA, should not be included on the list. Secondly, the identification of a Nanyang artist was an artist who used Nanyang style could be conflicting as they had very different art training. Unlike most Nanyang artists who received art education from both Western and Chinese traditions, Lim Cheng Hoe, who was largely a self-taught artist, did not go through formal art school. Lim was trained under Richard Walker, using Western mediums such as watercolour and oil paints, when he was studying in Raffles Institution. Richard Walker, the first Art Master of Government English Schools and later made the Art Superintendent of Singapore Schools, was trained at Royal College of Art in London.²⁵ Another commonly named Nanyang artist Georgette Chen, who was born in China²⁶ and received art education in both New York and Paris, had shown very little evidence of Chinese tradition in her paintings. Thirdly, the identification of who were the Nanyang artists often

²⁵ Low. Pg 26-38

²⁶ It was recorded in her interview that she was born in Paris, but newer findings revealed that she was born in Zhejiang, China. See Jane Chia and Museum Singapore Art, *Georgette Chen* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, 1997).

differed from one organisation to another. For instance, the inclusion and exclusion of Nanyang artist were different in the following retrospective exhibitions. In 1979, the Kuala Lumpur National Museum of Art organised a retrospective group exhibition on Nanyang artists which was curated by guest curator Redza Piyadasa. The 40 showcased artists included Lim Hak Tai, Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen-Hsi, and Georgette Chen.²⁷ In 1982, the Ministry of Culture, Singapore organised a series of retrospective solo exhibitions²⁸ to honour pioneer artists such as Lim Cheng Hoe, Lim Hak Tai, Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen-Hsi, Cheng Chong Swee and Georgette Chen. Lim Cheng Hoe was excluded from the 1979 exhibition. Lastly, if Nanyang style was a blend of painting techniques from the West and Chinese pictorial tradition on a local subject matter, why was Lee Man Fong excluded from almost all writings on Nanyang style? Lee went to Bali for painting excursion as early as 1941.²⁹ He painted oil paintings of Balinese women with Western fixed-eye perspective and brushstrokes inspired from Chinese painting. Although he moved from Singapore to Jakarta at the age of 23, took up Indonesian citizenship and spent most of his adulthood as a prominent painter highly recognised by Indonesian President Sukarno, Lee Man Fong was a permanent residence of Singapore and spent the last 20 years of his painter life in Singapore. As a respectful pioneer artist of Southeast Asia, Lee was seldom or never considered as a Nanyang artist in the writing of Nanyang.

The definition of Nanyang style

The term Nanyang style was first scholarly defined by Redza Piyadasa³⁰ and T.K. Sabapathy³¹ in the 1979 retrospective exhibition sponsored by the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

²⁷ Sabapathy and Piyadasa.

²⁸ T. K. Sabapathy, "Nanyang Artists and Their Style," *The Straits Times*, 6 December 1981.

²⁹ Man-Fong Lee and Gallery SooBin Art, *Lee Man Fong Fine Selection : Soobin Art Gallery, 10th Anniversary & Inaugural Exhibition, 12-21 May 2000* (Singapore: SooBin Art Gallery, 2000).

³⁰ Piyadasa.

³¹ T. K. Sabapathy, "The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks," *ibid*.

which featured artworks by 40 artists over the period 1938 to 1965. Sabapathy acknowledged that there were no critical explanation or definition on terms and labels such as the Nanyang artists, the Nanyang movement, the Nanyang school and the Nanyang style, which had been used frequently in the discussions of Malaya modern art.³² By his definition, Nanyang style used the blend of techniques from the East and the West— Chinese painting traditions and the School of Paris on local subject matter such as kampung and local tropical fruits.³³ He suggested that the Nanyang artists, like many others who were in search of a new art, were attracted to the School of Paris, which was the only model that articulated the idea of modern in art. The hanging scroll concept and the brush techniques from traditional Chinese painting, together with the easel painting tradition and the focus on light, colours, space and form from the School of Paris equipped the Nanyang artists with the relevant pictorial vocabulary for individual expressions.³⁴ Nanyang style was a reflection to Lim Hak Tai's call for expressing "the reality of the Southern Seas" and the local flavours in their artworks.³⁵

Kwok Kian Chow, eminent writer in museology and art history, suggested that Nanyang style might have started its roots from the local literary circle.³⁶ The repercussions from the China 1919 May Fourth Movement resulted an initiation and call for local identity and consciousness. An article published in 1927 under *Huang Dao* 荒岛 section on the local newspapers *Xin Guo Ming Ri Bao* 新国明日报 written by Zhang Jin Yan called for the inclusion of local cultures and flavours in literary works.³⁷ In the article, local food and spices such as coconut, turmeric, curry and coconut milk were used to juxtapose Chinese traditions such as the Yellow River,

³² Ibid.

³³ "Nanyang Artists and Their Style."

³⁴ "Scroll Met Easel," *The Straits Times Annual* (1982). Pg 119-121

³⁵ Ibid. Pg 114

³⁶ Kian Chow Kwok, *Channels & Confluences : A History of Singapore Art* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, Singapore Art Museum, 1996). Pg 24

³⁷ Jin Yan Zhang, 张金燕, "Nanyang, Literature and Arts 南洋与文艺," *Xin Guo Ming Ri Bao, Huang Dao* 新国民日报·荒岛, 1 April 1927.

the Five Classics and the Great Flood of Gun-Yu. *Nanyang secai* 南洋色彩, literally translated as Nanyang colours, had the essence of Nanyang flavours— a reflection of local culture and identity. Between 1927 and 1930, numerous articles that discussed on the literary theories on Nanyang colours were published on local newspapers.³⁸

The founding principal of NAFA, Lim Hak Tai's ideologies were a call for "regional consciousness" for the local artists. In 1955, an exhibition titled *The Art of Young Malaysians* was held and Lim shared his thoughts on art education and the role of a Southeast Asia artist in the preface of the catalogue.³⁹ Lim believed that as an artist in Malaya, one should depict the localness of the place. He urged for the reflection of the reality of the Southern seas in artworks, which was an aspiration shared by him and his contemporaries.⁴⁰ The ideologies of Lim Hak Tai, which later serve as the guiding principles of NAFA were⁴¹:

1. Fusion of cultures of the different races
2. Bridging of Eastern and Western art
3. Diffusion of the scientific spirit and social thinking of the 20th century
4. Reflection of the needs of the people of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore
5. Expression of local tropical flavour
6. Fulfillment of educational and social needs

³⁸ Yu Mei Goh, "Xunzhao Nanyang Cong 1920 Niandaimo Wenyililun Chutan Wenren Dui Nanyang Zhi Yingxiang 寻找“南洋”: 从 1920 年代末文艺理论初探文人对南洋之印象," (Singapore: Biblioasia, 2017).

³⁹ Hak Tai Lim, "Preface" in "The Art of Young Malaysians 南洋青年美术," ed. NAFA (Singapore 1955).

⁴⁰ T. K. Sabapathy, "Hak Tai Points the Way," *The Straits Times*, 28 February 1981.

⁴¹ Sze Wee Low, "Lim Hak Tai— Art and Life," in *Chuan Cheng Yu Kai Tuo : Xin, Zhong Liang Guo Yi Shu Jiao Liu Zhan : Lin Xueda Ji Lin Youquan Mei Shu Zuo Pin Zhan = Crossing Visions : Singapore and Xiamen : Lim Hak Tai and Lim Yew Kuan Art Exhibition* (Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 2011). Pg 37. Refer to Appendix 2.1 for the original Chinese text.

With Lim Hak Tai as the founding principal, NAFA was opened with 14 fine art students in 1938.⁴² The school had strong affiliations with the Nanyang artists as the teachers included Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen-Hsi, Chen Chong Swee and Georgette Chen Liying. Occasionally, the term “second-generation” was used on the NAFA graduates who used to study under the first-generation artists, such as Khoo Sui Hoe, Cheah Yew Saik and Seah Kim Joo,⁴³ Ng Eng Teng, Goh Beng Kwan, Thomas Yeo, Teo Eng Seng and Wee Beng Chong.

1952 Bali trip

The 1952 Bali trip which involved Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen-Hsi and Chen Chong Swee was often seen as the watershed event in the development of Nanyang style.⁴⁴ Although there were records of other artists that showcased paintings of Bali before the world war two, Adrien-Jean La Mayeur, a Belgium artist, was seen as the inspirational figure for them to embark the trip. La Mayeur held three successful exhibitions at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Singapore in 1933, 1937 and 1941.⁴⁵ As recollected by Chen Chong Swee in his writings in 1969, La Mayeur originally sailed towards Tahiti in search for the exotic paradise which had inspired Paul Gauguin.⁴⁶ On his way he passed by Bali and was awed by the soul-stirring dance moves and singing of the vigorous and graceful Balinese women. La Mayeur’s paintings on the Balinese women and the indigenous cultures served as an exotic inspiration to the newly emigrated Chinese artists. He and his Balinese wife also hosted the four artists when they were in Bali. The one-month long sketching and photography trip was followed by a nine-day group exhibition at the British Council Hall in November

⁴² Mang Thong Yeo, *Migration, Transmission, Localisation : Visual Art in Singapore (1866-1945)* (Singapore: National Gallery, Singapore, 2019). Pg 86

⁴³ Sabapathy, "The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks."

⁴⁴ "Nanyang Artists and Their Style."

⁴⁵ Kwok. Pg 30

⁴⁶ "Chen Chong Swee : His Thoughts," in *Chen Chong Swee : His Thoughts, His Art* (Singapore: National Museum, 1993).

1953.⁴⁷ This exhibition on the Bali trip directed the art community to focus on local themes and brought new inspirations to the four artists.⁴⁸

Nanyang today

Since the 1990s, there were more scholarly writings on the topic of Nanyang style and also its possible relation with politics. Curator Seng Yu Jin's thesis discusses the discourse and convergence of the Nanyang style and the Malayan School of Painting in the 1940s to 50s.⁴⁹ Nanyang style was led by the Chinese educated in both literary and art circle, while the Malayan School of Painting represents ideologies propagated by the British government in the Grand Design (or Greater Malaysia).⁵⁰ In 1950, Lim Hak Tai used the term 'Malayan school' of painting and defined it as the mixing of Eastern and Western painting styles.⁵¹ The convergence of the two terms could be seen as an early effort in creating a Malayan identity, in preparation of the merger between the Federation of Malaya with Singapore in 1955.

Cultural medallion award winner⁵² Chua Ek Kay's thesis discussed about the emergence of Nanyang style and its role in the regionalism of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.⁵³ He defined Nanyang style as a form of ASEAN aesthetics and the mediation of the East and West was not purely an aesthetics process, but 'a harmonious

⁴⁷ "Bali Paintings on Display," *The Straits Times*, 4 November 1953.

⁴⁸ Marco C.F. Hsü and Chee Kien Lai, "Understanding Local Colour," in *A Brief History of Malayan Art* (Singapore: Millenium Books, 1999).

⁴⁹ Yu Jin Seng, "The Primacy of Painting: The Institutional Structures of the Singapore Art World from 1935 to 1972" (2007). Pg 57-63

⁵⁰ The Grand Design is a British government scheme, created in view of the long-term plan of uniting their colonies in Southeast Asia, leading to the formation of Malaysia in 1962. See Tai Yong Tan, "The 'Grand Design' : British Policy, Local Politics, and the Making of Malaysia, 1955-1961," in *The Transformation of Southeast Asia: International Perspectives on Decolonization*, ed. Marc Frey, Ronald W Pruessen, and Tai Yong Tan (2015).

⁵¹ Noni Wright, "East and West Meet in a Malayan Style of Painting," *The Straits Times*, 29 October 1950.

⁵² Chua Ek Kay was awarded the Cultural Medallion in year 1999.

⁵³ Ek Kay Chua, "The Emergence of the Nanyang Style and Its Role in the Regionalism of Asean Countries" (University of Western Sydney, Nepean, 1997).

articulation between art and environmental sentiments in conceiving a sense of localness'.⁵⁴ First formed as a political group in 1967, the main cooperation within ASEAN was on economics. It was only till the 1993 ASEAN symposium that was held in Manila where a call for regional identity was initiated.⁵⁵ Nanyang style was a part of Singapore's cultural history which encompassed all cultural interests and differences, could be possibly used as a model in finding the Singaporean cultural identity.⁵⁶

The key components which defined the Nanyang style had also been challenged and the term was used with more cautiousness. In an article on the pre-war artworks of Chen Chong Swee, Singapore historian Yeo Mang Thong and artist Foo Kwee Horng attempted a discursive discourse on Nanyang style and provided some alternate views.⁵⁷ The lack of access to primary evidence research, in the form of old Chinese newspapers, from pre-war years by the English writers might have led to the misinterpretation of Lim Hak Tai's idea of Nanyang art. The 1952 Bali trip was seen to have no parallels or sequels in the quest of Southeast Asian artform. There were records that since 1939 artist Tchang Ju Chi had been making painting trips to Indonesia and his paintings depicted the local culture and tropical colours.⁵⁸ Represented by Tchang Ju Chi, Low Kway Song and Yong Mun Sen, the pre-war artworks had truly depicted the realities of the times, culture and tropical sceneries played a significant role in the art history of Singapore and should not be overlooked.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Pg 55-56

⁵⁵ *The Aesthetics of Asean Expressions: A Documentation of the Second Asean Workshop, Exhibition and Symposium on Aesthetics (Manila, Philippines 8-21 October 1993)*, (Manila, Philippines: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1994).

⁵⁶ . Pg 61-62

⁵⁷ Yeo and Foo. Pg 70-72

⁵⁸ Ibid. Pg 71-72

Kevin Chua's article in 2017 questioned the importance of the Bali paintings and he was uncomfortable with T.K. Sabapathy's methodology on approaching the Nanyang paintings.⁵⁹ The formalist approach, which was largely used by the universities in Euro-America in the 1950s and 1960s, was based on pictorial understanding of the style and iconography of the artwork. He argued that the Nanyang paintings should not be taken at face value but to be "read in the light of the social throng, the din and buzz of the city."⁶⁰

Emelia Ong pointed that the two essays by Redza Piyadasa and T.K. Sabapathy in 1979 were written with the intention to spark further dialogues on Nanyang style, however, had become canonical texts which had been 'much quoted and commented on'.⁶¹ In the discussion of Nanyang artists, she classified them into two distinct groups: the Bali-fours and the Equator Art Society. Known for the historical Bali trip that was made in 1952, the four pioneer artists Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen-Hsi and Chen Chong Swee focused on finding new pictorial structures to express the tropical environment. While the Equator Art Society, which was formed in 1956, consisted of artists Lim Yew Kuan, Lee Boon Wang, Tan Tee Chie, See Cheen Tee, Choo Keng Kwang, Chua Mia Tee and Koeh Sia Yong,⁶² had strong influence from China seminal leftist writer Lu Xun and emphasised on the social aspects of art.

In the publication introducing the Singapore Gallery *Siapa Nama Kamu?* which was published by the National Gallery Singapore, curator Ong Zhen Min reevaluated the 1952 Bali trip.⁶³ She avoided the term Nanyang style and used the subtitle "Representation of Southeast Asia

⁵⁹ Kevin Chua, "When Was Modernism? A Historiography of Singapore Art," in *Charting Thoughts: Essays on Art in Southeast Asia*, ed. Sze Wee Low and Patrick D. Flores (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2017).

⁶⁰ Ibid. Pg 29

⁶¹ Emelia Ong, "The Nanyang Artists: Eclectic Expressions of the South Seas," in *Imagining Identities*, ed. Khairuddin Nur Hanim, Narratives in Malaysian Art (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: RogueArt, 2012).

⁶² Ibid. Pg 67

⁶³ Zhen Min Ong, "Nanyang Reverie," in *Siapa Nama Kamu? : Art in Singapore since the 19th Century*, ed. Singapore National Gallery (Singapore: 2015).

landscape in Nanyang art". She suggested that there could possibly be two historical junctures in the concept of "tropical paradise". First, it was introduced via overseas Chinese literature which resulted Lim Hak Tai's call for region consciousness and the reflection of the realities of the South seas in the artworks. Second, it was conflated by Paul Gauguin, French post-impressionist artist who was best known for his primitive paintings in Tahiti. She highlighted that just like other Western artists who were attracted to the primitive living in Bali; in the early 20th century where social mores such as sexual desires were not repressed, the Nanyang artists' fascination with the exotic new cultures from Bali could have overshadowed their intention of painting the realities of the Southeast Asian environment.⁶⁴ However, she acknowledged that the 1952 Bali trip highlighted the richness of Balinese culture and brought about the appearance of Southeast Asian material culture in the Nanyang paintings.

Concluding notes

A lack of full understanding of Sabapathy's writing and the use of quick short quotes could be the cause behind the Nanyang style debate. By Sabapathy's definition, Nanyang style is primarily a term that identifies the beginning of modern art in Singapore. The definition is not termed without basis or relevance. Cheong Soo Pieng's artwork fits best into the Nanyang style definition. Both Piyadasa and Sabapathy singled out Cheong Soo Pieng on his innovative and unconventional artwork which are important contributions to Singapore's modern art.⁶⁵ The problem is that this definition is not be applicable to all Nanyang artists. Chen Chong Swee's paintings, on the other hand, has shown none of the stylistic exaggerations that modern artists tended to lean towards.⁶⁶ A large percentage of the current Nanyang research is done using the

⁶⁴ Ibid. Pg 48

⁶⁵ T.K. Sabapathy, "O No! Not the Nanyang Again!," in *Writing the Modern: Selected Texts on Art & Art History in Singapore, Malaysia & Southeast Asia, 1973-2015*, ed. T.K. Sabapathy, et al. (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2018).

⁶⁶ Hsü and Lai. Pg 73

model of the Euro-America scholarship and through the lens of Western aesthetics. It is not the most appropriate or fair method to understand and interpret artwork by Nanyang artists who paint in Chinese ink. Chen Chong Swee, for instance, paints in both Western and Chinese mediums with a blend of Western painting techniques and Chinese traditions. In order to fully appreciate and comprehend his artwork, other than reading with a Western aesthetic lens, the viewer may need a basic understanding of the principles in Chinese paintings. Lastly, the existing literature on Nanyang art tends to neglect the artwork itself. There is an over-emphasis on the debate regarding the definition of “Nanyang style”. In-depth writings on visual constructions and the use of colours are often left undiscussed. To have a fair investigation on Chen’s practical colour application, a thorough understanding on the concept of colours and how they are used in Western and Chinese paintings is essential and will be covered in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE: UNDERSTANDING HOW COLOURS WERE USED IN THE WEST

3.1 The School of Paris

In the following chapter, the concepts of how artists, specifically the School of Paris, used colours in the late 19th and early 20th century will be examined. In 1920s to 30s China, art movements are nourished by modernism from Europe, particularly the School of Paris.⁶⁷ Aspects of this trend is reflected in the curriculum of China art academies.⁶⁸ Although Chen Chong Swee did not study in Paris, he probably received the same impulsion when studying at Xin Hua Academy of Fine Arts which was located in Shanghai, China. In Singapore (then Malaya), the paintings done by the pioneer artists often used a blend of West (School of Paris) and East (Chinese traditions) painting techniques. As this research studies the use of colours by one of Singapore's prominent pioneer artists Chen Chong Swee, it is essential to have a good understanding of the art practices and common colour knowledge in Paris during the late 19th to early 20th century. The term School of Paris did not refer to a specific art institution or movement. Paris was the home to modern art movements such as Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Abstract Art and Surrealism.⁶⁹

The Impressionists

Who were the Impressionists? Emmile Blemont explained in the article published on *Le Rappel*, 9 April 1876:

⁶⁷ T. K. Sabapathy, "Soo Pieng's Style," *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1981.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bernard Dorival, Cornelia Brookfield, and Ellen Hart, *The School of Paris in the Musée D'art Moderne* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962).

“They [the Impressionists] do not imitate; they translate, they interpret. They set out to extract the result of the multiple lines and colours that the eye perceives at a glance before an aspect of nature.”⁷⁰

In 1874, the “Societe Anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs” (anonymous society of painters, sculptors and engravers) was organised by a group of painters whose work got rejected frequently by the annual Salon.⁷¹ The name *Impressioniste* came from one of the thirty painters Claude Monet’s painting *Impression, Soleil Levant*. The term was coined by Louis Leroy, a journalist and art critic of the French newspaper *Le Charivari* and was initially meant to ridicule the artists.⁷² The Impressionists did not believe in following the rules and agreed standards of taste and practice of an academic subject. Neither did they worry about the drawing, line and form, or light and shade of the subject. Monet once shared that when painting, one should try to forget about the objects in front of them and to look at them as colours. “Merely think here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you”.⁷³ Although there were writings on how the Impressionists had confused the concept of additive colour mixing in light with subtractive colour mixing in pigments,⁷⁴ they were nonetheless forerunners in understanding the concept of colour application and how human eyes perceive an image. They managed to grasp certain scientific principles and translated them into painterly terms.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Emile Blemont, "The Impressionists [1876]," in *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, ed. Joshua Charles Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Pg 437

⁷¹ Ibid. Pg 436

⁷² Ibid. Pg 436

⁷³ Lilla Cabot Perry, *Reminiscences of Claude Monet from 1889 to 1909* ([Washington 1927]).

⁷⁴ J. Carson Webster, "The Technique of Impressionism a Reappraisal," *College art journal / College Art Association of America*. (1945).

⁷⁵ Philip Ball, "The Reign of Light Impressionism’s Bright Impact," in *Bright Earth : The Invention of Colour* (US: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Pg 175

Colour science and art

Colour theories written by scientists were widely used by the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists in their paintings. During the Neo-Impressionists period, colour science was not only eagerly accepted by the artists, it was generally assumed that a great artist must be well versed in physiological optics and the phenomenon of vision.⁷⁶ Scientist Michel-Eugene Chevreul's findings on the concept of contrast in complementary colours served as a stamp of scientific authority although it had been long known empirically to painters that the perception of colour was influenced by its surroundings.⁷⁷ Other influential scientists included Hermann von Helmholtz⁷⁸ and Odgen Rood,⁷⁹ who translated and rooted Chevereulean complementaries into available materials and pigments which were accessible by artists.⁸⁰ Monet echoed Helmholtz when he said, "Colour owes its brightness to force of contrast rather than to its inherent qualities... Primary colours look brightest when they were brought in contrast with their complementaries."⁸¹ This principle was clearly reflected in Monet's painting *The Poppy Field Outside of Argenteuil* (Figure 3.1) where he painted the flowers in blots of red-orange and red, in contrast with the dominant green grass.

⁷⁶ Enid Verity, "Colour-Science and Art," in *Colour Observed* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980). Pg 141

⁷⁷ Ball. Pg 175

⁷⁸ Hermann von Helmholtz and James P. C. Southall, *Helmholtz's Treatise on Physiological Optics* (Bristol, England; Sterling, VA: Thoemmes, 2000).

⁷⁹ Ogden Nicholas Rood, *Modern Chromatics: With Applications to Art and Industry*, vol. 26 (D. Appleton, 1879).

⁸⁰ Ball. Pg 177

⁸¹ Ibid. Pg 178

Figure 3.1 Monet, Claude. *Poppies*. Oil on canvas, 50 x 65cm, 1873. RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) /Hervé Lewandowski Collection. Accessed on 12 December 2019. https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/poppy-field-8951.html?cHash=1e5e9216e3

In his other painting *Impression: Soleil Levant* (Figure 3.2), another set of complementary colours were used when the orange sun was placed in contrast with blueish sky. Neurophysiologist Margaret Livingstone suggested that Monet made use of the principle of equiluminant to make the sun appear brilliant and pulsate to the eyes.⁸² In *Impression: Soleil Levant*, Monet painted the sun and clouds in different hues and chroma, but in the same value. Livingstone explained that the equal brightness of the sun and sky made the brain unable to locate them in space, hence causing the pulsating effect. This lack of luminance contrast generated the illusory sensations of brightness and motion. In the digitally manipulated image (Figure 3.3-3.4), the pulsating effect disappeared when the value of the sun had been adjusted to a lighter value.

⁸² M.S. Livingstone and D. Hubel, *Vision and Art (Updated and Expanded Edition)* (Harry N. Abrams, 2014). Pg 119-121

Figure 3.2 Monet, Claude. *Impression: Soleil Levant*. Oil on canvas, 48 x 63cm, 1872. Musée Marmottan Monet Collection.
In Livingstone, M. *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing*. Harry N. Abrams, 2002, 120.

Figure 3.3 Black and white version of *Impression: Soleil Levant*.
In Livingstone, M. *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing*. Harry N. Abrams, 2002, 121.

Figure 3.4 Digitally manipulated *Impression: Soleil Levant*
In Livingstone, M. *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing*. Harry N. Abrams, 2002, 121.

Divisionism is a painting method developed by Georges Seurat that breaks down or divides colours into separate components.⁸³ This method of painting which he called *peinture optique*, where closely spaced dots were placed next to each other to enable optical mixing, was later known as pointillism.⁸⁴ Seurat's paintings tested out the colour theories from Ogden Rood, who used spinning disks to prove that pigments could be optically combined.⁸⁵ He believed that the only way to capture the glowing sunlight was through optical mixing, when the paint surface seemed to flicker as the eyes was at the verge of seeing two colours become one.⁸⁶ In 1885, Seurat exhibited *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (Figure 3.5) in the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition and the painting had since been seen as the leading example in the divisionist technique. Instead of painting the tree green, Seurat used tiny dots of yellows, greens,

⁸³ Terry W. Strieter, *Nineteenth-Century European Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999). Pg 57-58

⁸⁴ Ball. Pg 188

⁸⁵ Steven Bleicher, *Contemporary Color: Theory and Use* (Cengage Learning, 2012). Pg 27

⁸⁶ Ball. Pg 188

reds and blues to compose the field (Figure 3.6). The result was a shimmering green tree that changed colours when viewed from a certain distance.⁸⁷

Figure 3.5 Seurat, Georges. *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* – 1884. 1884-1886. Oil on canvas. 207.5 x 308.1 cm. Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection. Accessed on 12 December 2019. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/27992/a-sunday-on-la-grande-jatte-1884>

Figure 3.6 Close up of *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*

⁸⁷ Sadie F. Dingfelder, "The Scientist at the Easel," *American Psychological Association* 41, no. 2 (2010).

Chen Chong Swee and the School of Paris

Unlike the Impressionists and Neo-impressionists, Chen Chong Swee might not have read about colour theories. From Chen's writings, despite having a strong knowledge in Western art history, he did not mention a hint on understanding colour science or using Western colour theories in his paintings. Chen did not consciously employ Western colour theories when he was painting and this was reflected in his paintings, which would be examined in the case study chapter. However, he could have used it intuitively on his painting due to the overall art direction and training from Xin Hua Academy of Fine Arts, which had some commonalities with the art academies in Paris. The next segment provides a brief history of how colour theories were developed in the West using physical and psychological science.

3.2 A Brief History on the Development of Colour Theories

The discovery and research of colours were dated back to Aristotle, who studied the rainbow and proposed that red, green and violet were the only true colours in colour vision.⁸⁸ The critical development in understanding the science of colour was made in 1709 when Isaac Newton published *Opticks: A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colors of Light*.⁸⁹ Through his experiments, he discovered that with a glass prism, white light could be decomposed into a visible spectrum that was made up of seven colours; namely red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. He implied that colour harmony existed in nature. He related colours to the seven musical tones and introduced a circular colour arrangement (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7 Newton's colour wheel. Newton, Isaac. *Opticks, or, a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections Colours of Light*. Courier Corporation, 1952, 155.

Newton's study on properties of light was also furthered by several scientists, such as Thomas Young, Hermann Helmholtz and David Brewster.⁹⁰ However, in the early eighteenth century Europe, the concept of physical science or Natural Philosophy was seen as destroying the beauty of nature by some. Newton was said to have killed the poetic beauty of the rainbow

⁸⁸ Aydin M. Sayili, "The Aristotelian Explanation of the Rainbow," *Isis* 30, no. 1 (1939).

⁸⁹ Isaac Newton, *Opticks, or, a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections & Colours of Light* (Courier Corporation, 1952).

⁹⁰ For more information on the development of light stimuli after Newton, see Paul D. Sherman, *Colour Vision in the Nineteenth Century: The Young-Helmholtz-Maxwell Theory* (Taylor & Francis, 1981).

when he reduced light to its prismatic colours.⁹¹ One of the renowned disputes came from Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, the Romantic poet from Germany.

Goethe first published *Theory of Color* in 1810. His book, which had been widely used since was later translated to English by Charles Eastlake in 1840.⁹² Goethe rejected Newton's doctrine of light and colour, which was based on physical science. He disagreed that darkness was an absent of light. He carried out experiments which were more experienced-based and explored the perception phenomenon and physiological experience of human. This marked the start of the research in colour psychology. Goethe also opposed Newton's theory where white light was a synthesis of colours. He proposed that colours recomposed into grey. In present-day understanding, Goethe's theory was based on the principle of Subtractive Mixing in pigments, while Newton's theory was based on Additive Mixing in coloured light.⁹³ Goethe's diagonal placement of opposed colours was also an early understanding of simultaneous contrast in colours.⁹⁴ Although scientifically Goethe's theory was superseded by Newton, it had impacted the artists of the time, one of them was J.M.W. Turner.⁹⁵

The colour science breakthrough which left a substantial impact on the art world was Michael-Eugene Chevreul's *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours, and Their Applications to the Arts*.⁹⁶ Chevreul discovered the theory of simultaneous contrast where human perceived a colour differently when two colours were placed side by side.

⁹¹ For more reception of Newton's *Opticks*, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, "The Popular Reception of the *Opticks*," in *Newton Demands the Muse*, ed. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Newton's Opticks and the 18th Century Poets* (Princeton University Press, 1946).

⁹² Von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Theory of Colours*. Vol. 3: Mit Press, 1840.

⁹³ Sherman.

⁹⁴ Ibid, paragraph 50 'for the colours diametrically opposed to each other in this diagram are those which reciprocally evoke each other in the eye. Thus, yellow demands purple; orange, blue; red, green; and *vice versa*:' .

⁹⁵ Gerald Finley, "Pigment into Light: Turner, and Goethe's Theory of Colours," *European Romantic Review* 2, no. 1 (1991).

⁹⁶ M. E. Chevreul, "Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours (1839) Reprinted, Introduction and Notes by F. Birren," (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1967).

“If we look simultaneously upon two stripes of different tones of the same colour, or upon two stripes of the same tone of different colours placed side by side, if the stripes are not too wide, the eye perceives certain modifications which in the first place influence the intensity of the colour, and in the second, the optical composition of the two juxtaposed colours respectively.”⁹⁷

Chevreul’s theory of simultaneous contrast gave the Impressionists a theoretical basis of optical colour mixing, which were reflected in the works of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac. They pioneered the painting style of Pointillism by portraying light with tiny contrasting colours brushstrokes, using an optical mixture of lights and shadows. Opposite colours in the colour wheel, which also known as complementary colours, appear more vibrant when placed next to each other. For example, the colour green would appear greener when placed beside the colour red (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8 The effect of the Law of Simultaneous Contrast when the colour green appear greener when placed beside the colour red. Photo: Goh Huiying.

In 1905, Albert Henry Munsell created the first colour order system and colour notation system that was offered commercially, known as the Munsell Colour System.⁹⁸ Benefiting from the 3D model concept that was developed by forerunners such as Lambert, Runge, Chevreul and Ostwald,⁹⁹ Munsell introduced an asymmetrical 3D colour model which proved that the practical range of each hue was not equal (Figure 3.9). He redefined the three qualities of colour

⁹⁷ Ibid. Paragraph No.8

⁹⁸ A. H. Munsell, "A Pigment Color System and Notation," *The American Journal of Psychology* 23, no. 2 (1912).

⁹⁹For information on Lambert, Runge and Ostwald, see Rolf G. Kuehni, *Color Space and Its Divisions : Color Order from Antiquity to the Present* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Interscience, 2003).

as hue, value and chroma.¹⁰⁰ Hue referred to the name of the colour. Value was the lightness and brightness of the colour. Chroma described how strong the colour was.

Figure 3.9 Munsell's asymmetrical colour tree and sphere.
In Munsell, A. H. *A Color Notation*. Boston: G.H. Ellis Co., 1905, 32.

Munsell's systematic way of communicating colour appearance left a massive impact on modern colour measurements and specification systems, such as Commission International de L'Eclairage (CIE).¹⁰¹ Although he was an enthusiastic colour teacher and his patent for the colour sphere was meant for educational purposes, Munsell was better recognised for his contribution towards the development of colour science. It was Johannes Itten's writings that left a heavy mark on colour education.

Johannes Itten, a teacher and education theorist, was one of the core team in the Weimar Bauhaus school. He drew his colour teachings significantly from Goethe, on the

¹⁰⁰ A. H. Munsell, *A Color Notation* (New York: Munsell Color Co., 1919). Pg 18-20

¹⁰¹ Edward R. Landa and Mark D. Fairchild, "Charting Color from the Eye of the Beholder: A Century Ago, Artist Albert Henry Munsell Quantified Colors Based on How They Appear to People; Specializations of His System Are Still in Wide Scientific Use," *American Scientist* 93, no. 5 (2005). Pg 436

‘psychologically postulated rule of complementaries’.¹⁰² Itten was alerted by the visual effects of simultaneous contrast and discussed “The Seven Colours Contrasts” in his book *The Art of Colour*.¹⁰³ To explain how colours were organised, he illustrated a twelve-part star which included the graded scales of twelve colours, a colour sphere and a colour circle (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10 Itten's twelve-pointed colour star.
In Itten, Johannes, Faber Birren, and Ernst Van Hagen. *The Elements of Colour*. Chichester: Wiley, 1970, 67.

In his suggested colour exercises, an art student would gain good colour control similar to how a musician practised music scales.¹⁰⁴ He also identified different combinations of harmonised colours, which was derived from systematic colour relationships, that could be used as a basis for composition.¹⁰⁵ Itten identified them as dyads, triads, tetrads and hexads (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11 Itten's concepts of triads, tetrads and hexads.
In Itten, Johannes, Faber Birren, and Ernst Van Hagen. *The Elements of Colour*. Chichester: Wiley, 1970, 73-74

¹⁰² Henry P. Raleigh, "Johannes Itten and the Background of Modern Art Education," *Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (1968). Pg 286

¹⁰³ Johannes Itten and Ernst Van Haagen, *The Art of Color ; the Subjective Experience and Objective Rationale of Colour* (New York: Reinhold, 1962).

¹⁰⁴ Johannes Itten, Faber Birren, and Ernst Van Hagen, *The Elements of Colour* (Chichester: Wiley, 1970). Pg 5

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Although scientists in the nineteenth century made major developments in colour theories, the study of colour and light by artists could be traced back to the fourteenth century. A substantial amount of writings had been contributed to understanding the concept of colour application and practice during the Renaissance period.¹⁰⁶ The concept of colour application engaged by Cennino Cennini and Leonardo Da Vinci were based on the human eye perception, but the discussion on the use of colours was minimal. During the Renaissance period, the artists' colour palette was mostly made up of earthy tones. Colour pigments like ultramarine blue came from gems and were used solely on highly patronised paintings.¹⁰⁷ The focus in terms of painting technique was on chiaroscuro, the volumetric treatment of light and shade. When the thriving ports of Venice brought in the first pick of pigments, Titian used sumptuous reds, blues, violets and pinks in his paintings. However, Michaelangelo remarked disparagingly towards Titian's use of colours: "it was a pity that the Venetians were not taught to draw better."¹⁰⁸ The use of high intensity colours was uncommon in the sixteenth century. It was until the Industrial Revolution took place in the late eighteenth century, that synthetic colours were invented along with the development of the cloth dye industry. Colours were commonly used and seen in everyday life in the age of Impressionism, especially in the city of art, Paris.¹⁰⁹ With the invention of camera, photorealism was no longer a principle in the new art movement led by the Impressionists.

Chen Chong Swee and Western Colour Theories

¹⁰⁶ Marcia B. Hall, *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 1992). See also James S. Ackerman, "On Early Renaissance Color Theory and Practice," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 35 (1980).

¹⁰⁷ Victoria Finlay, *Colour : Travels through the Paintbox* (London: Sceptre, 2002). Pg 287-291

¹⁰⁸ Ball, "The Eye of the Beholder the Scientist in the Studio." Pg 5

¹⁰⁹ Laura Anne Kalba, *Color in the Age of Impressionism: Commerce, Technology, and Art*, vol. 22 (Penn State Press, 2017).

Although Chen Chong Swee did not consciously employ Western colour theories in his paintings (he might not have read the original texts on Western colour theories), his training from the Xin Hua Academy of Fine Arts had most probably impacted his practical colour application to follow the way how the School of Paris used colours in their paintings. From Chen's writings, the concept and principles behind his paintings were largely from the Chinese tradition instead of Western modern science. Unlike the West where the use of colours is based on colour theories which are developed from modern science, the Chinese used and understood colours very differently. In the next chapter, the concept of colours in Chinese painting will be examined.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONCEPT OF COLOURS IN CHINESE PAINTING

4.1 A Brief History of How Colours Were Used in Chinese Painting

The concept of colours in Chinese painting was based on philosophies which was a combination of values from yinyang, five elements, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.¹¹⁰

The understanding and use of colours were dependent on the beliefs and values of the Chinese society. The development of the concept of colours in Chinese painting could be seen as two phrases: before Tang-Song and after Tang-Song period.¹¹¹ During and before Tang-Song period, colourful and vibrant colours were preferred and widely used in Chinese paintings. After Tang-Song period, the status of black and white Chinese ink paintings was elevated and remained as the preferred school of painting till today. This brief history of how colours were used in Chinese painting would be presented in chronological order in the following chapter.

Pre-Tang

Colour was first mentioned in one of the earliest Chinese texts *Book of Documents* (*shangshu* 尚书): “when fully displayed in the five colours, so as to form the ceremonial robes” (*wucai zhangshiyu wuse, zuofu ruming* 五采彰施于五色, 作服汝明).¹¹² The use of colours in Chinese art and costumes were restricted by the five elements, namely, metal, wood, water, fire and earth.¹¹³ Early Chinese paintings existed in the forms of silk, engraved bronze vessel, painted earthenware, and tomb tile. During the Han dynasty, the painting subjects were closely related

¹¹⁰ Wen Juan Wang, 王文娟, *An Aesthetic Exploration of Colours in Chinese Painting* 墨韵色章—中国画色彩的美学探渊 (China 中国: Central Compilation & Translation Press 中央编译出版社, 2006). Pg 269

¹¹¹ Ibid. Pg 12, 31

¹¹² From chapter 3 of *Shangshu*, Yu Shu— Yi and Ji. English translations from <https://ctext.org/shang-shu>. Accessed on 31 December 2019.

¹¹³ De Peng, 彭德, *Chinese Five Colours* 中华五色 (China 中国: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House 江苏美术出版社, 2008). Pg 26-27

to religious beliefs and practices such as the worship of the sun and moon, and the portrayal of the past and afterlives of the tomb owners.¹¹⁴ Under the rule of its first emperor Han Wudi (汉武帝), the ruling and concept of colours during Han dynasty were heavily influenced by Confucianism.¹¹⁵ The common usage of the colour red during Han dynasty was due to theories on yinyang and five elements (*yinyang wuxing lun* 阴阳五行论) where Han dynasty was considered as the element of Fire.¹¹⁶ After the fall of the Han dynasty, books written on Taoist philosophies started to be read and followed by people. The Confucianist philosophies no longer dominated the society. The rise of literati culture changed the concept of colours during the Six Dynasties.¹¹⁷ A new form of painting— mountain-water painting (*shanshui hua* 山水画) was created. During this divided period, a new religion— Buddhism was also introduced to China. Under the influence of Buddhist art, colour blue and green were added to the Chinese colour palette.¹¹⁸

Tang-Song

During Tang dynasty, Chang'an (*chang an* 长安), the Tang capital was the largest city in the world, and the expansion of regional and international trades stimulated China's economic growth.¹¹⁹ In terms of music and art, the Tang Chinese were open to foreign influences from the other cultures. It was not uncommon to be a Taoism or Buddhism follower and practised

¹¹⁴ Chen Gong, 龚晨, "The Colour Combinations and Colour System of the Han Tomb Paintings 汉墓壁画色彩组配样式及色彩标系建构," in *The Seminar of 2016 Chinese Traditional Color Theory 2016 中国传统色彩理论研讨会论文集* (China 中国: Culture Art Publishing House 文化艺术出版社, 2016). Pg 248-258

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Pg 258-263

¹¹⁶ Peng. Pg 137-139

¹¹⁷ *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004). Pg 1-2

¹¹⁸ Wen Juan Wang, 王文娟, "An Examination of the Declination and Philosophy of Blue-Green Landscape Painting 青绿山水画的哲学基础和衰弱原因探微," in *The Seminar of 2016 Chinese Traditional Color Theory 2016 中国传统色彩理论研讨会论文集* (China 中国: Culture Art Publishing House 文化艺术出版社, 2016).

¹¹⁹ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Pg 108

Confucianism at the same time. Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism formed the philosophical foundation of blue-green mountain-water painting (*qinglv shanshui* 青绿山水),¹²⁰ sometimes known as gold-green mountain-water painting (*jinbi shanshui* 金碧山水), where gold dust was used to create a brilliant effect. Imperial court portrait paintings, often done as court maid painting (*shinv tu* 仕女图), were bright in colours and high in contrast. This integration of Buddhist art and local traditions in brushwork formed the peak in heavy-colouring meticulous painting (*gongbi zhongcai renwuhua* 工笔重彩人物画).¹²¹ After the collapse of Tang dynasty, despite the decline in the economy and society stability, the progress of Chinese painting escalated during the Five dynasty period. Painting subjects such as flower and bird (*huaniao* 花鸟), human (*renwu* 人物) and mountain-water (*shanshui* 山水) continued to flourish.

Song dynasty experienced a revival in Confucianism in the society and the emphasis on imperial examination led to the rise of literati, also known as the scholar-officials. The literati were intellectuals who aspired to be imperial court officials and also well versed in painting, calligraphy and poetry. The concept of the Three Perfections: Chinese painting, poetry and calligraphy (*shishuhua sanjue* 诗书画三绝)¹²² was initiated by lead literati-painter Su Shi (苏轼) (also known as Su Dong Po 苏东坡). They followed the values of Confucianist, where a man was to lead a life with high virtues. This revival of Confucianist philosophies started a new trend of painting style known as literati painting (*wenren hua* 文人画). Unlike the paintings by the imperial court painters, literati painters emphasised on capturing the inner spirit of the subject and not the craft in painting.

¹²⁰ Wang, "An Examination of the Declination and Philosophy of Blue-Green Landscape Painting 青绿山水画的哲学基础和衰弱原因探微."

¹²¹ Tong Yu Zhang, 张桐瑀, *100 Painters Who Impacted the Development of Chinese Painting 影响中国绘画进程的100位画家* (China, Haikou 中国, 海口: Hainan Publisher Co 海南出版社, 2003).Pg 40

¹²² Michael Sullivan, *The Three Perfections : Chinese Painting, Poetry, and Calligraphy* (New York: George Braziller, 1999).

Yuan-Ming-Qing

Yuan dynasty, which was ruled by the Mongolians, marked the start of a non-Han ruler in China. The literati started to distant themselves from society as there was less demand for them in the imperial court due to the change of policies by Mongolian rulers.¹²³ Painting subjects such as withered trees, bamboos and rocks were in dominance.¹²⁴ The literati painters often adopted the Zen philosophy from Buddhism. There was minimal use of colours, and the focus was on ink play. The other school of painting during Yuan dynasty was court painting (*yuanti hua* 院体画). In *Twelve Faults in the Painting Tradition* (*huizong shier ji* 绘宗十二忌, Rao Ziran 饶自然), who was associated to the school of court painting, listed the twelve points to be avoided in Chinese painting. The twelfth fault highlighted the preferred method to use colours when painting various subjects:

‘Colouring without proper method. It may be said, that in the use of colours as well as in the use of gold and green there is a heavy and a light method. For mountains one may use the light green of the shells, but trees should be coloured with a composite green; for figures one should use a preparation with white powder’¹²⁵

During the Ming dynasty, China was once again ruled by Han-Chinese, but under strong reinforcement of rules and regulations under emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang (朱元璋).¹²⁶ The Royal Art Academy was re-established, and literati-scholars was once again in demand by the imperial court. During the middle of Ming dynasty, Jiangnan Suzhou area experienced economic prosperity, and the economy began to move towards capitalism.¹²⁷ Literati paintings, which started as a hobby and a mode of expression by the literati, became a profession and

¹²³ Ebrey. Pg 176-177

¹²⁴ Jengyi Lin, *Imperial Taste: The Beauty of Painting* (Taiwan: Acoustiguide Asia Ltd., 2015).Pg 93

¹²⁵ Osvald Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting : Texts by the Painter-Critics, from the Han through the Ch'ing Dynasties* (2005). Pg 114-118

¹²⁶ Ebrey. Pg 190

¹²⁷ Zhang. Pg 149

gained popularity among the common people. Two major schools of painting—Wu (吴) and Zhe (浙) school, which conveyed the aesthetics of “scholarly refinements” and “robust vigour” dominated the period.¹²⁸ The use of colours remained subdued, and ink play continued as the emphasis in paintings.

Towards the end of Ming dynasty and the start of Qing dynasty, Dong Qi Chang (董其昌) reorganised the development of literati paintings, and he came up with the classification that the schools of paintings could be divided to southern and northern (*hua fen nanbei zong* 画分南北宗).¹²⁹ According to Dong Qichang, this division of schools could be traced back to Tang dynasty, when the northern school was led by Li Si Xun (李思训) with blue-green (*qinglv* 青绿) and the southern school was led by Wang Wei (王维) with ink (*shuimo* 水墨). Dong Qichang’s theories left a heavy impact on future painters and the development of literati paintings. During the Qing dynasty, China was again conquered by a non-Han tribe—the Manchus (*manzu* 满族). The followers of Dong Qichang remained as the custodians of the literati traditions but became overly obsessed with the concept of restoring the past and became repetitive.¹³⁰ There was also a start of European influence on the court art.¹³¹ The other group of painters during the Qing dynasty were the Ming loyalists such as Zhu Da, Shiqi and Shitao, and the Four Wangs and the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou.¹³²

20th Century Onwards

¹²⁸ Lin. Pg 118

¹²⁹ Zhang. Pg 183

¹³⁰ Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Pg 253

¹³¹ Ibid. Pg 250-252

¹³² For more information, see *ibid.* Pg 255-264

With the collapse of Qing dynasty and the dissolve of the feudal system, the society and traditions that supported the theories behind literati paintings were shaken.¹³³ There was an influx of Western paintings in China, and it became common for Chinese artists to travel overseas to learn new painting theories and techniques. Artists started to incorporate Western painting theories and techniques into Chinese painting, and new schools such as the Lingnan School (*lingnan huapai* 岭南画派) started. Some of them incorporated the western concept of chiaroscuro, and their use of colours was strong and contrasting. Other schools included the Shanghai School, which included artists such as Wu Chang Shuo (吴昌硕) and Pan Tian Shou (潘天寿).¹³⁴ The Beijing Conservism representative Qi Bai Shi (齐白石) and independent artists Huang Bing Hong (黄宾虹), Fu Bao Shi (傅抱石) and Zhang Da Qian (张大千) were the precursors of modern Chinese painting.¹³⁵

Chen Chong Swee and the Concept of Colours in Chinese Painting

Chen Chong Swee did not have a specific school of thought for colours. However, he regarded Xie He's *Six Principles of Chinese Painting* as the anchoring text for Chinese painting. He once wrote, "Over the course of a thousand years, the history of Chinese painting has seen a great number of schools and lineages, but as far as the basis of art-making and appreciation is concerned, they do not surpass the Six Principles."¹³⁶ Xie He's Six Principles (also known as the Six Laws, Six Canons and Six Methods) (*liufa* 六法), which was recorded in *Record of the Classification of Painters* (*guhua pinlu* 古画品录), was written in Southern Qi dynasty (479-

¹³³ Zhang. Pg. 258 to 267

¹³⁴ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Pg 13-15

¹³⁵ Ibid. Pg 9, 16-21

¹³⁶ Chen et al. Pg 16

501 BCE). It was seen as one of the most influential texts on Chinese painting. Osvald Sirén's translation for the Six Principles was:

The first: Reverberation of the life-breath; that is, the creation of movement.

The second: Bone-method; that is, the (proper) use of the brush.

The third: Reflection of (To conform with) the objects; that is, the depiction of forms.

The fourth: Deference to types; that is, the application of colours.

The fifth: The layout of the design; that is, the arrangement of positions.

The sixth: Transmission and perpetuation; that is, the copying of (old) models.¹³⁷

Out of the six principles, the fourth principle *suilei fucai* (随类赋彩) was translated to “the fourth: deference to types, that is, the application of colours”¹³⁸ or “suitability to type (the laying on of colours).”¹³⁹ Although the word *cai* (彩) translated as ‘colour’, it had a broader meaning of ‘external charm’. The word *fu* (赋) could be translated as ‘applying (of the form)’ or it could also mean ‘describing’.¹⁴⁰ In William Acker’s translation, the fourth principle was simplified to “appropriateness to type”.¹⁴¹ Hence Xie He’s fourth principle may have the word *cai*, it may not refer to the physical application of colour pigments but the use of a descriptive representation of the painting subject. This non-representational method of using colour was due to the philosophies behind Chinese tradition, which formulated the principles in Chinese painting.

¹³⁷ English translation from Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles. Part 1: The First Millennium*, vol. 1, Early Chinese Painting (Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., ltd., 1956). Pg 5. Refer to Appendix 4.2 for the English translations and original Chinese text of Xie He’s *Six Principles*.

¹³⁸ Ibid. Pg 5

¹³⁹ Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁰ James F. Cahill, "The Six Laws and How to Read Them," *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961). Pg 377

¹⁴¹ William Reynolds Beal Acker, *Early Chinese Painting*, vol. 1, Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Paintings (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954). Pg xli

4.2 Principles of Chinese Painting

The three philosophies that had heavily impacted China were Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Due to the continuity in Chinese history, for over five thousand years, these ideas and concepts went through the different stages of introduction, declination and revival. In Taoism, it was believed that the origin of Tao was emptiness. From emptiness, the cosmos was born, and vital breaths were emanated. In *The Classic of the Way's Virtues* (*daode jing* 道德经) Laozi (老子) said, “The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things” (*dao sheng yi, yi sheng er, er sheng san, san sheng wanwu* 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物).¹⁴² Tao was the originator of undivided universe, the universe gave rise to Yin and Yang, which gave rise to heaven, earth and people, and they gave rise to all the worldly things. Another Taoism philosopher Zhuangzi (庄子) said, “(their fondness for) the five colours disorder the eye” (*wuse luanmu* 五色乱目).¹⁴³ Objects that were too vibrant in colours would disturb the eyes and disrupt the peaceful thoughts of man, which had a negative impact on the pursuit of the Way. Taoism followers believed that one should integrate to nature and be part of the universe and let things take their course naturally.

In Confucianism, a man was taught to lead a life with no extremes and to sustain high virtue ethics and be benevolent. In *The Analect* (*lunyu* 论语), Confucius (*kongzi* 孔子) said, “perfect is the virtue which is according to the constant mean” (*zhongyong zhiwei deye* 中庸之为德也).¹⁴⁴ Confucianists painters usually had a light colour palette with minimal painting

¹⁴² From chapter 42 of Laozi's *The Classic of the Way's Virtues*. English translations from <https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>. Accessed on 31 December 2019.

¹⁴³ From chapter 15 of Zhuangzi's *Outer Chapters— Heaven and Earth*. English translations from <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/heaven-and-earth>. Accessed on 31 December 2019.

¹⁴⁴ From chapter 29 of *The Analect— Yong Ye*. English translations from <https://ctext.org/analects/yong-ye>. Accessed on 31 December 2019.

techniques, but a strong focus on the personality and moral of the painter. Such examples were reflected in the paintings by the literati scholars in the Song dynasty.

Due to the spread of Hinayana Buddhism and as Mahayana Buddhism fused with the local cultures and traditions such as Taoism and Confucianism, the use of colours in Buddhist inspired paintings changed from vibrant to subdued. In *Heart Sutra* (*banluo boluomiduo xinjing* 般罗波罗蜜多心经), the Buddha said, “form is emptiness, emptiness is form” (*se jishi kong, kong jishi se* 色即是空，空即是色).¹⁴⁵ The word *se* (色), did not mean the literal translation colour, but the form of an object or the effect of the cause. The word *kong* (空), which was translated as emptiness, had the meaning of the initiated thoughts or the cause of the effect. Karma and the laws of cause and effect were the key principles in Buddhism. The concept of emptiness in Buddhism also meant perceiving from the non-existence. The combination of the above values and Chinese philosophies gave birth to the following principles in Chinese painting: spirit vitality, emptiness-fullness, and brush-ink.

Spirit Vitality

In *Six Principles* by Xie He, the first law was “spirit vitality” (*qiyun shentong* 气韵神通). There were multiple ways to transcribe and understand this phrase. “Resonance of spirit; movement of life”, “rhythmic vitality” or “spiritual rhythm expressed in the movement of life”. Breath (*qi* 气) was the source and driving energy behind all life forms. According to Xie He, a good painting should have “breath” in it and possessed life itself. Breath dictated the compositional sequence and flow of the image, which provided smooth visual interactions between the painting and the audience. In the treatise *On Painting* (*hualun* 画论), Gu Kai Zhi (顾恺之) said

¹⁴⁵ Pine Red, *The Heart Sutra* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: Counterpoint, 2009).

that the spirit should be transmitted through form (*yixing xieshen* 以形写神). Other than capturing the physical likeness of a human, the soul and spirit likeness must be inclusive. In *Celebrated Painters of Tang Dynasty* (*tangchao minghualu* 唐朝名画录), Zhu Xuan Jing (朱玄景) came up with the four classes for the grading of paintings: Divine class (*shen* 神), Sublime class (*miao* 妙), Capable class (*neng* 能) and Transcendent class (*yi* 逸).¹⁴⁶ The highest quality paintings were classified under the Divine class where they were composed by the most talented painters with brushwork and skills that exceeded the ordinary range. They were also done with divine inspiration and demonstrated spirit vitality.

Emptiness-Fullness

There were two ways to understand “emptiness” in the Taoist ontology. The first term “empty” (*wu* 无) was the opposite of “being” (*you* 有), which could be understood as nothingness. The second term “empty” (*xu* 虚) is the opposite of “fullness” (*shi* 实), which could be understood as hollowness.¹⁴⁷ A third term “empty” (*kong* 空), which was later used in Buddhism, had a meaning of non-existence (*fei you* 非有). Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi (庄子)(369-286 BCE) said, “from emptiness of mind springs light; in that the salvation of man is found”.¹⁴⁸ Through emptiness, the rhythm of space and time, and the laws of transformation were mastered by man. The idea of polarity was the basis of Chinese painting techniques such as “darkness and lightness” (*yinyang* 阴阳) in brush strokes and “open and shut” (*kaihe* 开合) in pictorial composition.

¹⁴⁶ Maria Po Suen Cheng, Weixiong Deng, and Eric Choy, *Essential Terms of Chinese Painting = Zhongguo Hui Hua Ci Hui Lei Bian* (2018). Pg 46-49

¹⁴⁷ Francois Cheng, *Empty and Full: The Language of Chinese Painting* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994). Pg 43

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Pg 54

Brush-Ink

Brush-ink (*bimo* 笔墨), was a common term in Chinese painting because ink in isolation was just a material. It was the brush that gave life. Colour was often used as a complementary technique to fill up the in-betweens after the structure had been formed with brush-ink. Han Chuo from the Song period said, “The brush to give birth to substance and form, and the ink to capture colour and light.”¹⁴⁹ The action of light ruled the atmosphere, tonality, distance, and sculptural form, which was expressed through the play of ink.¹⁵⁰ Zhang Yanyuan (张彦远) wrote in the *Notes of Past Famous Paintings* (*lidai minghua ji* 历代名画记) that the ink provided all five colours (*yunmo er wuse ju* 运墨而五色具). The rendering of values in ink was often used interchangeably with the word “colour”.¹⁵¹ Tang Dai (唐岱) from Qing dynasty said that there were six colours in ink (*mose zhizhong, fenwei liucai* 墨色之中, 分为六彩). A total of five types of ink were identified as independent colours: dry, wet, concentrated, diluted, black (*gan shi nong dan hei* 干湿浓淡黑)¹⁵². The sixth was white (*bai* 白), which referred to the empty white space in the pictorial composition.

The principles in Chinese painting were highly based on “concept” (*yi* 意) and not “appearance” (*xiang* 象).¹⁵³ Song poet Chen Yuyi (陈与义) wrote that when the likeness in spirit and concept were sufficient, no colour resemblance would be required (*yizu buqiu yanse si* 意足不求颜色

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Pg 65

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. Pg 78

¹⁵¹ Peng. Pg 86-89

¹⁵² The literal translation of *hei* 黑 is black, but in this context, it is used as an adjective to describe “dark”.

¹⁵³ Jian Ming Song, 宋建明, "A Discussion on the Relationship between “Appearance” and “Concept” in Traditional Chinese Color Theory 试论传统中国色彩之“象”与“意”的关系," in *The Seminar of 2016 Chinese Traditional Color Theory 2016 中国传统色彩理论研讨会论文集* (China 中国: Culture Art Publishing House 文化艺术出版社, 2016). Pg 1-13

似).¹⁵⁴ The Chinese philosophies were reflected on the prevalent two-fold learning process in Chinese painting that was: First, learning from the objects (*shiwu* 师物) with a deep observation of the objects and nature. Second, learning from the mind (*shixin* 师心), to internalise and combine the objective observations with the subjective thinking onto the creation.¹⁵⁵ Colours on the other hand, were rarely mentioned in these general principles of Chinese painting.

Chen Chong Swee and the Principles of Chinese Painting

Chen's Chinese paintings reflected a good use of pictorial composition and brushwork which comprised of techniques derived from spirit vitality, emptiness-fullness and brush-ink. Although Chen received formal Western art training from Xin Hua Academy of Fine Arts, his foundation was in Chinese calligraphy, seal carving, poetry and Chinese ink paintings.¹⁵⁶ Chen quoted principles from Xie He's *Six Principle of Chinese Paintings* in his writings on Chinese paintings, but he did not mention about how colours should be used in them. In contrast, he once said that "Only in the aspect of colours is Western painting somewhat richer than its Chinese counterpart."¹⁵⁷ It was highly possible that he understood how to use colours from his Western art training. This analogy will be expanded in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁴ From Song Poet Chen Yuyi's *He Zhang Ju Chen Shui Mo Mei Wu Jue* 宋代陈与义《和张炬臣水墨梅五绝》：意足不求颜色似，前身相马九方皋。

¹⁵⁵ Cheng, Deng, and Choy. Pg 31-32

¹⁵⁶ *Chen Chong Swee : A Legacy in Truth Goodness and Beauty : An Exhibition and Publication That Commemorates the Centenary of the Artist's Birth*. Pg 8-18

¹⁵⁷ Chen et al. Pg 16

CHAPTER FIVE: CHEN CHONG SWEE AND CASE STUDY OF HIS SELECTED PAINTINGS

The key research question of the thesis focuses on investigating the relationship between the pioneer artists' resettlement and the usage of colours in their paintings. When the pioneer artists came to Singapore (then Malaya), did they change the way they use colours? The geographical location and the living environment (often used as a painting subject) between China and Malaya are very different. Did the sunlight from the tropical island impact their colour choices and the way they mixed colours? In order to have an accurate result, the selected case study artist's paintings should have a realistic portrayal of the lighting condition and actual colours of the environment. Among Singapore's pioneer artists, Chen Chong Swee's paintings are most suited for this investigation. The other secondary research questions are how has the artist's training in Western painting influenced the way he did his Chinese painting, and vice versa? And how has the medium impacted his painting process and/or impacted the result of the painting? Chen has shown strong versatility in the use of different mediums in his artwork, making him the most suitable case study artist. Below is a table breakdown on the number of exhibited paintings that are done in various mediums.

Medium	Quantity	Year Range
Watercolour	75	1951 to 1979
Chinese Ink	121	1939 to 1981
Oil	11	1937 to 1971
Pastel	2	1965 to 1967
Poster Colour	3	1949 to 1953
Drawings	9	1935 to 1962

Figure 5.1 Table of Chen Chong Swee's locally exhibited paintings from 1935 to 1981¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

5.1 Singapore Pioneer Artist Chen Chong Swee

“Among the sane, there is neither literature written for oneself, nor painting painted for oneself... all works of art are created with another person in mind, that is, the reader, the listener or the viewer.”

- Chen Chong Swee

Chen believed that art-making was not about self-expression but with the ability to transmit a message. This humanistic aspect of art was vitalised by Chen Chong Swee's constant renewal of observations and the use of picturesque compositions to engage the viewer.¹⁵⁹ T.K. Sabapathy described Chen Chong Swee's aesthetic position as *communicable imagery*.¹⁶⁰ As a representational painter, Chen's honest observations of his living environment and society made him the most appropriate case study artist among the Singapore's pioneer artists.

Chen Chong Swee (*Chen Zong Rui* 陈宗瑞), also known as Chen Khai (*Chen Kai* 陈楷), was born in Chenghai County, Guangdong Province, China in 1910.¹⁶¹ As the eldest son in a merchant family, he was supposed to take over the family business after he graduated from the Guangdong Business School in 1927. Despite his family's objections, Chen went on to study fine art at the Union High School in Shantou, China, where he met his future wife Zheng Bi Jun. With the support of Zheng, Chen Chong Swee continued to study at the Xinhua Academy of Fine Arts in Shanghai, where he met fellow Nanyang artists such as Liu Kang and Chen Wen-Hsi. In 1932, he accepted the post as a primary school teacher and moved to Penang,

¹⁵⁹ T. K. Sabapathy, "Communicable Imagery a View of Works by Chen Chong Swee," in *Chen Zongrui Cai Mo Hua Ji = the Paintings of Chen Chong Swee* (Singapore: Nan feng mei shu she, 1983). Pg 11

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *Chen Chong Swee : A Legacy in Truth Goodness and Beauty : An Exhibition and Publication That Commemorates the Centenary of the Artist's Birth*. Pg 100

which was also part of British Malaya. It was only until 1934 that he moved to Singapore, the place where he called home and served the art community till he passed away in 1985.

Different from his peers, Cheong Soo Pieng, Liu Kang and Chen Wen-Hsi who had explored deeply into modern art,¹⁶² Chen Chong Swee held to his roots in Chinese traditions and rejected art that did not communicate with the viewer with representational forms.¹⁶³ He did not see the need to change for the sake of changing because what was seen as new today, would be labelled as old in the future.¹⁶⁴ Chia Wai Hon, art critique and writer, credited Chen Chong Swee as the first Singapore artist to put into practice of Lim Hak Tai's suggestion for an art that captured "the reality of the Southern Seas."¹⁶⁵

Art Educator

Chen Chong Swee was an art educator for the most of his life. Before arriving in Singapore, he taught in Penang Jit Sing Chinese Public School and Malacca Chung Hwa School respectively. After his resettlement in Singapore, Chen taught in various schools such as Tuan Mong School, Chung Cheng High School, The Chinese High School, and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA). Chen retired from the Chinese High School and NAFA in 1971 and 1975 respectively.¹⁶⁶

Key Member in the Local Art Community

¹⁶² Cheong, Liu and Chen explored modern art styles such as Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Abstract Expressionism.

¹⁶³ Chen. Pg 10-12

¹⁶⁴ *The Compilation of Chen Chong Swee's Writing/Chen Zongrui Wen Ji* (Singapore 2010). Pg 34

¹⁶⁵ Wai Hon Chia, T. K. Sabapathy, and Centre Contemporary Asian Arts, "Bits and Pieces : Writings on Art," (Singapore: Contemporary Asian Arts Centre, 2002). Pg 49-51. First published in *The Aesthetics of Asean Expressions: A Documentation of the Second Asean Workshop, Exhibition and Symposium on Aesthetics (Manila, Philippines 8-21 October 1993)*.

¹⁶⁶ Chen et al. Pg 206

Chen Chong Swee received the Singapore Public Star Award in 1965 for his contributions to Singapore visual arts. He was one of the founding members of the Society of Chinese Artists (SOCA) and took on key roles such as President and Vice-President between 1954 and 1974.¹⁶⁷ He also co-founded the Singapore Watercolour Society (SWS) and held several key committee positions such as the third President from 1973 to 1974.¹⁶⁸ Chen was also appointed as the Vice-president of the Singapore Art Society between 1964 and 1966. Chen served as the member of the National Day Art Exhibition Selection Committee from 1970 to 1981, and advisor to NAFA, Singapore Teachers Art & Craft Association and the San Yi Finger Painting Society.¹⁶⁹

Writer

Chen was very diversified in knowledge: Chinese general history, Chinese painting art history, as well as Western art history. He left behind a large number of writings in Chinese language, which were published over the years and recently been translated.¹⁷⁰ In his article, *Foreword for an Exhibition by Five Artists*, he cross referenced the local painters who gathered near Nathan Road with the Barbizon school painters Rousseau, Millet and Corot who painted the landscape and the scenes of the peasant life in Barbizon.¹⁷¹ In *A Casual Discussion on Chinese and Western Painting*, Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Jacques-Louis David, Eugene Delacroix, Jean-Francois Millet, Monet and Van Gogh were artists that he named when walking through the timeline of Renaissance to Romantic period and Impressionism.¹⁷² Chen also shared his thoughts on the principles of Chinese painting and Western painting in a number

¹⁶⁷ The Society of Chinese Artists SOCA, *65th Anniversary Exhibition Art Works of the Society of Chinese Artists 中华美术研究会 65 周年作品集* (Singapore 2000).Pg 32-37

¹⁶⁸ Personal interview with SWS President Seah Kang Chui on 5 May 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Chen et al. Pg 207

¹⁷⁰ Chen et al; *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* Pg 23.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* Pg 27-29.

of articles. To him, Western art was analytical and down-to-earth while Eastern art was synthetical and numinous.¹⁷³ In Western aesthetics, there was a pursue in the accurate portrayal of realism during the Renaissance period and the capturing of light and shadows during Impressionism. The Chinese aesthetics, however, was very much based on emotions and love. Chinese painting was more than capturing the external resemblance on the subject, but also the resonance of spirit and the vitality flow in the brush. Chen Chong Swee regularly referenced Xie He's *Six Principles* when explaining about the key principles behind Chinese paintings. He also shared his concept of "New Chinese painting" where he recommended the inclusion of local surroundings into Chinese painting instead of following the books and copy sceneries from the Song Dynasty.¹⁷⁴ To him, art was a reflection of the realities in current surrounding. As a continuation from Chinese tradition and connecting to the local culture, he suggested that Malay poetry could perhaps be used as written inscriptions as part of Chinese painting. When asked how the content and form of Chinese painting could be renewed, Chen had the following response: "It should integrate and recast techniques from Western painting, accommodate new subjects, and be able to express modern life."¹⁷⁵

Artist

Despite being an active member in local art societies and group exhibitions, Chen only had one solo art exhibition in his life time. The retrospective exhibition that featured 220 of his paintings was held in 1984, jointly presented by the Ministry of Culture and National Museum, Singapore.¹⁷⁶ In 1959, an invitation letter was drafted by the Honorary Secretary of the

¹⁷³ Ibid. Pg. 93.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. Pg 89-91, 95-97.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Pg 90.

¹⁷⁶ "Page 19 Miscellaneous Column 2," *Singapore Monitor*, 17 Novemeber 1984. Retrieved from <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/singmonitor19841117-1.2.32.2?oref=article-citation>. Accessed on 26 November 2019.

Singapore Art Society (SAS) to invite Chen to hold an exhibition with his paintings and SAS would be the sponsor.¹⁷⁷ It was untraceable as to why the exhibition did not happen. In 1983, in remembrance of his late wife Tay Peck Koon, who had been supportive of him in his art career throughout the lifetime, Chen compiled 143 paintings and published the book *The Paintings of Chen Chong Swee*.¹⁷⁸ The book recorded a total of 143 paintings, consisting of watercolour, oil painting, Chinese painting and charcoal sketches. Through the years of active participation in local art societies and group exhibitions, Chen exhibited a total of 221 paintings between the year 1935 to 1981.¹⁷⁹

Chen led a life with principles from the Chinese traditions where man should lead a life of integrity, modesty and discipline. In the graduation magazine for the 19th batch of NAFA graduating students, Chen shared an old Chinese idiom: “All skyscrapers are built from the ground up”.¹⁸⁰ This idiom was served as an encouragement to young artists who were still seeking out and in the process of learning, and also as a reminder to professional artists not to forget their fundamentals. In one of his writings, he expressed his disregard on overseas artists who came to Singapore just to make money out of art exhibitions and did sales pitches to wealthy businessman. He also expressed his concerns over armature artists who blindly followed art trends and forgot about their core values. To him, the reason behind the different styles by artists was due to their differences in self-cultivations and personalities. Chen’s art beliefs serve as an inspiration for the practical component of this thesis, which will be presented at the very last chapter.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from the Honorary Secretary of SAS to Chen Chong Swee dated 20 January 1959. Retrieved from <https://roots.sg/learn/collections/listing/1084153>. Accessed on 25 November 2019.

¹⁷⁸ Chen, *Chen Zongrui Cai Mo Hua Ji = the Paintings of Chen Chong Swee*.

¹⁷⁹ From Chen Chong Swee Retrospective 1984 unpaginated.

¹⁸⁰ Chen et al. Pg 21

Chen believed that art and life were inseparable and art was a product of its time.¹⁸¹ To him, an artwork was considered a failure if the audience could not relate or understand it. The mission of an artist was not only to evoke appreciation and admiration through artistic skill, but also to create emotive resonance with the audience as they were immersed in the milieu of beauty.¹⁸² He believed that art should be communicable with the audience and not used as a medium for self-expression.¹⁸³ Hence for his fifty years of art creation, Chen Chong Swee painted representationally and stayed truthful to the painting subject. This aspect of his art practice made Chen the most suitable Singapore pioneer artist to be used as the case study artist. In the next chapter, 14 paintings were selected to investigate Chen Chong Swee's practical colour application.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Pg 89

¹⁸² Ibid. Pg 74

¹⁸³ Chen, *Chen Zongrui Cai Mo Hua Ji = the Paintings of Chen Chong Swee*. Pg 10-12

5.2 Case Study of Selected Paintings by Chen Chong Swee

Chen Chong Swee's painting could be categorised into three periods. The first period was when he arrived in Singapore (then Malaya) and used art skills that were learnt in China to create paintings of the new surroundings. Most of the paintings during this period were less vibrant in colours and mainly done in Chinese ink. The second period was when he started to use vibrant colours to depict the colourful Malaya environment. He also first used watercolour as a painting medium. Although the use of colours was vibrant, the paintings tended to look disjointed as the colours did not mix well and could not be balanced within the pictorial composition. The last period was almost forty years after he migrated to Singapore (then Malaya) when he had mastered the techniques and understood the strength and limitation of all painting mediums. His paintings during this period showed an improved understanding of human body construction and colour mixing.

The selection criteria of the case study paintings are based on the level of artistic achievement and how suitable it is to be used to explain the various visual construction concepts of each period. Good artistic achievement is judged by the ability to communicate and convey the artist's message to the viewer, the arrangement and construction of the pictorial composition, and the mastery of the painting medium (e.g. confidence of brushwork, understanding of colour mixing, and good control of the wet and/or dry properties of the medium). Out of the 14 paintings, 6 are done in Chinese ink; 4 in watercolour; and 4 in oil.¹⁸⁴ In order to answer the question of whether the painting medium has impacted the result of the painting, it is essential to select a mix of paintings done in various mediums.

¹⁸⁴ Refer to Figure 5.1 for justification of the higher number of selected Chinese ink paintings. Between 1939 to 1981, Chen Chong Swee had exhibited a total of 121 paintings done in Chinese ink, which was also his most used painting medium.

Methods such as open-ended interviews and content analysis are used to investigate the artist's intention and the social context of the selected paintings. Formal analysis of the selected paintings is conducted to identify the audiences' perception. Non-conventional but pragmatic methods, such as the re-enactment of the painting process and colour palettes were also used to deconstruct the selected paintings. The strengths and limitations of the different mediums used by Chen are explored by the artist-researcher with experimental studies of the tools and materials. Mathematical-based softwares such as histogram and 3D Munsell colour space generators are used to analyse the usage of colours in the selected paintings.

The Munsell Colour Theory¹⁸⁵ serves as the theoretical framework for this discussion on Chen's practical colour application. It is the most complete 3D colour system to explain and map out colours. There are three qualities of colours, namely: hue, value and chroma.¹⁸⁶ "Tone", a musical term appropriately used on sound, is avoided in the description of colours.¹⁸⁷ Instead, the term "value", which is measured by the value-scale, will be used to describe all light or dark colour values.¹⁸⁸ "Intensity" described the degree of a quality more than being the quality itself, hence the word "chroma" is used to describe how strong a colour is.¹⁸⁹

Xie He's *Six Principles in Chinese Painting* will be the basis of discussion on principles of Chinese painting in this chapter. The history of Chinese painting is long and polythetic. Fortunately, it was made known from Chen's writings that he saw Xie He's *Six Principles in Chinese Painting* as the anchoring writing on Chinese painting. It will be fair to analyse Chen Chong Swee's paintings using the Six Principles.

¹⁸⁵ Refer to Appendix 3.1 for the colour qualities of Munsell Colour Theory.

¹⁸⁶ Munsell, *A Color Notation*. Pg 18-20

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. Pg 17

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Pg 16

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. Pg 17

To illustrate the evolvement of Chen Chong Swee's practical colour application, a mixture of Chinese ink, watercolour and oil paintings will be discussed and analysed in chronological order. To understand the social context of the selected paintings, the next segment will also highlight the activities that Chen Chong Swee were involved during that period. They can be identified in the following categories: 1930-40s South-seas in the eye of the new immigrant artist, 1950-60s Establishing Nanyang colours, and 1970-80s Singapore's pioneer artist.

1930-1940s: South-seas in the eye of the new immigrant artist

In 1932, Chen Chong Swee arrived in Penang, then part of the Straits Settlements, after accepting the teaching post in Jit Sing Chinese Public School.¹⁹⁰ He moved to Singapore in 1934 and started teaching art in Tao Nan School. In his early days in Singapore, his coloured artwork was done in either Chinese ink or oil. *My Son*, a painting that was done in oil on canvas in 1937 (Figure 5.2) was one of his earliest remaining work. It was exhibited in the Society of Chinese Artists (SOCA) 2nd Annual Exhibition which was held at the Y.W.C.A. Raffles Quay Singapore.¹⁹¹

Figure 5.2 Chen, Chong Swee. *My Son*, Oil on Canvas, 33cm x 42cm, 1937. Collection of Mr and Mrs Tan Wee Lee. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

In this painting, the features of the face were given the most refined brushwork and details. The eyebrows, nose and mouth, were sculpted carefully to bring out the likeness of the boy. He had a relatively steep forehead and a sharp pair of eyes brows. His narrow nose bridge was

¹⁹⁰ Chen et al. Pg. 201

¹⁹¹ The Society of Chinese Artists SOCA, "Society of Chinese Artists 2nd Annual Exhibition," (Singapore 1937).

highlighted by the light source from the left which cast a long shadow onto the pillow. The drapes and folds of the boy's shirt and the bedsheets were carefully articulated. Overall, it was a realistic painting that captured the resemblance of the subject and the lighting condition of the setting. Comparatively, the ears and hair were completed with much fewer details. The uncertain brush strokes at the boy's top-left ear and his right arm, however, revealed Chen's slight unfamiliarity with human anatomy. The boy's foreshortened right arm was painted slightly off in position, which made his shoulder a little too broad for his small body.

Figure 5.3 Colour palette of the skin tones used in *My Son*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Analogous (or neighbouring)¹⁹² colours were used in this painting. The main hue of the painting was yellow, which transit to greenish-yellow and brown (refer to Figure 5.3 for the mixing of colour pigments done by the artist-researcher). This painting was painted with little chromatic colours. Most of the colours were tinted (mixed with white) before it was applied to the canvas. Chen limited his use of chromatic colours and made use of contrasting values to construct the image. Using the Denman Ross nine-step value scale,¹⁹³ most of the skin tones in

¹⁹² Refer to Glossary of Colour Terms for definition of analogous colours.

¹⁹³ Denman Waldo Ross, *The Painter's Palette, a Theory of Tone Relations ; an Instrument of Expression*, by Denman Waldo Ross (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1919). Pg 2

My Son were between value 2 to 5. The darkest value was at the hair of the boy, which was between 7 to 8. The right body of the boy was painted with hard edges as the light source fell on his body. The left body was painted with soft edges which blended to the shadow on the bedsheet.

Denman Ross nine step value scale		
Value	Sample	Value Name
1		white
2		high light
3		light
4		low light
5		midvalue
6		high dark
7		dark
8		low dark
9		black

Figure 5.4 Denman Ross nine-step value scale, unknown, undated. Accessed on 12 December 2019.
<https://makingamark.blogspot.com/2010/11/denman-ross-value-scale.html>

Figure 5.5 Black and white version of *My Son*, Oil on Canvas, 33cm x 42 cm, 1937.

In 1936, Chen Chong Swee and ten other Chinese artists founded the Society of Chinese Artists (SOCA) (*zhonghua meishu yanjiuhui* 中华美术研究会). When SOCA was first formed under

the name Salon Art Society (*shalong yishu yanjiuhui* 沙龙艺术研究会), it had strict entry rules and only alumni from three China art schools were allowed to join the society. They were namely: Xinhua Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, and Shanghai University of Art.¹⁹⁴ Although membership was later opened to all artists in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia, the entry to the society remained tough as every new applicant would need to be recommended by an existing member. The committee also reserved the right to cancel an individual's membership if the member failed to participate in the society's art events or meetups actively. Chen Chong Swee was an active member of SOCA and held key positions such as the President and Vice-President.¹⁹⁵

Compared to the previous painting, *My Son*, which was also an oil on canvas painting, *Raining in Kampong*, had more visible brush strokes. The attap houses in the Kampong were painted with semi-abstract shapes where the windows and doors of the houses could barely be differentiated. Blobs of colours were used, and two human figures were briefly seen in front of the attap house on the right. The scrubs in the foreground were merely painted with short strokes of colours. The majority of the brushstrokes were done in a vertical motion to portray the raining setting. The subdued colour changes and vague representation of the subject could be an active decision by Chen Chong Swee to capture the ambience of the rainy weather as objects appeared less visible when viewed through heavy rainfall. In this painting, the colour green and its neighbouring analogous colours were used. The colours were namely: yellow, yellow-green, green, brownish-green, bluish-green and blue (refer to Figure 5.7 for the mixing of oil paints).

¹⁹⁴ The Society of Chinese Artists SOCA, *Art 85 in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary* 中华美术研究会五十周年画集 (Singapore 1985). Pg 13-18

¹⁹⁵ *65th Anniversary Exhibition Art Works of the Society of Chinese Artists* 中华美术研究会 65 周年作品集. Pg 32-37

Figure 5.6 Chen, Chong Swee. *Raining in Kampong*, Oil on Canvas, 38cm x 45cm, 1938. Collection of NAFA. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.7 Mixing of oil paints to reflect the colour palette of *Raining in Kampong*.
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Direct painting, or wet-on-wet technique was used in this painting.¹⁹⁶ For a better understanding of the painting process, the artist-researcher re-enacted the process (refer to Figure 5.8). The painting started from a sketch, which was drawn using a colour mixture consisted of dark-coloured paints such as black, blue, brown and green. Next, the background of the subject matter (trees, hill and sky) was painted in and followed by the foreground elements. The final details were added in last with smaller brush strokes. The entire painting process took two sessions as there were dry strokes used on the tree branches (on the left) and the middle ground trees (on the right). If the painting were done in one session, it would be impossible to form these hard edges. When the background layer was still fresh and wet, the paints from the background layer would mix with the new strokes, resulting in soft edges and blended brushwork.

Figure 5.8 Re-enactment of the painting process of *Raining in Kampong*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

¹⁹⁶ Direct painting is a technique that is commonly used by the Impressionists where paints are applied directly on the surface. The other method is known as indirect painting, which is commonly used by the Old Masters, where underpainting and glazing are used. For more information about the Impressionist technique and other oil painting techniques, see Frederick Palmer, *Encyclopaedia of Oil Painting : Materials and Techniques* (London: Batsford, 1984).

Since 1927, there had been a call for local identity and consciousness to include local cultures and flavours such as local food and spices into literary works. *Nanyang secai* 南洋色彩, often translated as Nanyang colour or flavour, was a term which started from the local Chinese literary circle.¹⁹⁷ Below is a series of Chen Chong Swee's paintings which are done in Chinese ink and colours. These paintings depict the everyday activities of Malay women in the village; the coconut trees under the moonlit Kampong; and the colourful tropical fruits which are only be found in Southeast Asia.

Figure 5.9 Chen, Chong Swee. *Tidying*, Chinese ink and colour, 83 x 60cm, 1949 (left). Collection of Mr and Mrs Tan Wee Lee. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011;

¹⁹⁷ For more detailed write up on Nanyang colours and the local Chinese literary, refer to Chapter Two: NANYANG. What is Nanyang? Who are the Nanyang artists?

Figure 5.10 Chen, Chong Swee. *Moonlight scene at Kampong*, Chinese ink and colour, 170 x 96cm, 1949 (right). Collection of Mr and Mrs Chen Chi Sing. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

These two paintings, which are both done in 1949 using Chinese ink and colours, reflect Chen Chong Swee's mastery in pictorial composition and his excellent control of values. In these two paintings, Chen combined the concept of linear perspective that was used in Western paintings with the principles of Chinese painting. Linear perspective, which has an Arab visual theory origin, is a concept invented during the Renaissance period to duplicate the natural perception of human's eyes.¹⁹⁸ Chinese painting on the other hand, uses a flattened perspective which is an idealistic approach where the viewer can depict more than what can be seen with the naked eye.¹⁹⁹ Guo Xi (郭熙) from Song dynasty posited the "Three Perspectives" (*sanyuan fa* 三远法) as "high distance" (*gaoyuan* 高远), "level distance" (*pingyuan* 平远) and "deep distance" (*shenyuan* 深远).²⁰⁰ A mountain can be viewed from three perspectives, namely: viewing from the bottom of the mountain, viewing at the eye level, and viewing at a top-down view from the top of the mountain. Unlike Western painting that uses a fixed-point perspective, Chinese painting includes the moving time element and records the passing of time. In these two paintings, Chen used fixed-point perspective to represent the gaze of an observer. Chen also fully made use of the pictorial composition to tell the story of the painting. From Xie He's *Six Principles of Chinese Painting*, "the fifth: The layout of the design; that is, the arrangement of positions."²⁰¹ The pictorial arrangement of an image conveys the space and depth of the subject matter. In terms of colour usage, these two paintings were painted within a small hue range. Most of the colours were in the browns and greys zone (refer to Figure 5.11-12). The

¹⁹⁸ Hans Belting and Deborah Lucas Schneider, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁹⁹ Kwo Da-Wei, "Chinese Brushwork in Calligraphy and Painting : Its History, Aesthetics, and Techniques," (2012). Pg 70

²⁰⁰ Cheng, Deng, and Choy. Pg 88-89

²⁰¹ Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles. Part 1: The First Millennium*, 1. Pg 5

below 3D Munsell colour space trees reflected the narrowness (compare to Figure 5.17 for full 3D Munsell colour space) of the colour zone used in *Tidying* and *Moonlight scene at Kampong*. The most extreme colours used were not of high chromatic value. In *Tidying*, it was a muted orange that was closer to the colour brown. For *Moonlight scene at Kampong*, the most top chromatic colour used was of greyish-purple.

Figure 5.11 Data plotted 3D Munsell colour space²⁰² of *Tidying* (left). Photo: Goh Huiying;

Figure 5.12 *Moonlight scene at Kampong* (right). Photo: Goh Huiying.

Other than noting the unique living environment of Malaya in his paintings, Chen Chong Swee also used tropical fruits as the subject matter. Common tropical fruits that were found in Singapore were: durian, rambutan, banana, mangosteen, pineapple and papaya. The below tropical fruit paintings, which were done with Chinese ink and colours were painted in 1939 and 1949 respectively.

²⁰² Data generated from the 3D Munsell colour space developed by Woon Lam Ng and Yikai Xiao, "Development of 3d Color Space to Improve Learning of Color Theory," in *2nd International Conference on Modern Management, Education Technology, and Social Science (MMETSS 2017)* (Atlantis Press, 2017). Internal school software <http://155.69.254.163:8080/colormapping/>. Accessed on 12 December 2019.

Figure 5.13 Chen, Chong Swee. *Tropical Fruits*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 100 x 34 cm, 1939 (left). Collection of Mr and Mrs Chen Chi Sing. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011;

Figure 5.14 Chen, Chong Swee. *DURIANS AND MANGOSTEENS*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 87 x 44cm, 1949 (right). Collection of Mr and Mrs Chen Chi Sing. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Both paintings were done with the same medium but with a different approach. One of the practices in Chinese painting involved the two-fold process of learning from the objects (*shiwu* 师物) and learning from mind (*shixin* 师心). It required the artist to draw without referencing the subject matter, but to paint from memory and express the essence and the spirit of the

subject. *Tropical Fruits* was painted with this Chinese two-fold process. The painting also used *wugu* 无骨 (boneless) method where no ink or outline was used to establish the skeletal structure of the object before colours were added to the painting.²⁰³ It was more of an abstract representation of tropical fruits where colour blue was used for the leaves of the pineapple.²⁰⁴ Whereas *Durians and Mangosteens* was painted in a Western structural manner, with the perspective and position of each object accurately portrayed. Each object had a coloured outline around it and was drawn with correct form and volume. The values were crafted with an overall light source in mind, capturing the highlights on the fruits and casted shadows in the basket when the fruits overlapped one another (refer to Figure 5.15-16 for the black and white version of both paintings to have a clearer view of the value). In *Chen Chong Swee: His Thoughts*, Kwok Kian Chow identified Chen Chong Swee's conscious fusion and experimental of Western painting principles (*chiaroscuro*) with Chinese painting (wrinkling method [*cunfa* 皴法]²⁰⁵ and Xie He's *Six Principles*) according to the requirement of the painting's subject matter.²⁰⁶ This analogy aligned with the techniques used in *Durians and Mangosteens*.

²⁰³ Fritz van Briessen, *The Way of the Brush : Painting Techniques of China and Japan* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1998). Pg 112-113

²⁰⁴ It was probably coincidental that Chen Chong Swee chose to paint the leaves of the pineapple in blue. An interesting side note that in ancient Chinese language, the Chinese character for colour blue was *qing* 青 (same character as the character we recognised today as colour green). For example, Chinese porcelain was written as *qinghuaci* 青花瓷 although there was no green but blue florals in them.

²⁰⁵ Cheng, Deng, and Choy. Pg 70

²⁰⁶ Kwok, "Chen Chong Swee : His Thoughts."

Fig 5.15 Greyscale image of *Tropical Fruits*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 100 x 34 cm, 1939 (left);

Fig 5.16 Greyscale image of *Durians and Mangosteens*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 87 x 44 cm, 1949 (right).

Other than achieving good values in the painting, Chen also reflected a good understanding of how hues interact with one another when colours are mixed. The three qualities of colours: hue, value and chroma in Munsell Colour Theory form an asymmetrical three-dimensional Munsell Colour Space (Figure 5.17). When two colours are mixed, they create a vector path consisting of transitional colours (Figure 5.18-19).²⁰⁷ Colour grey and brown are the transitional colours²⁰⁸ when opposite chromatic colours are mixed. For example, colour orange-red mixed with colour dark blue gives colour dark brown. In *Durians and Mangosteens*, a large amount of colour brown are used as the transition between colour green, orange, red and purple. (refer

²⁰⁷ Woon Lam Ng, "Practical Application of Browns and Grays Based on a Vector Concept- the Practical Strength the Asymmetrical Munsell Color Space," *Color Research & Application* 43, no. 6 (2018).

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

to Figure 5.21 for the re-enacted colour palette). The other difference between the two paintings is the value of the paper used. *Durians and Mangosteens* is painted on a yellow-tinted rice paper, which is higher in value. The use of yellow-tinted paper brings the range of the values smaller (less contrasting), hence easier to control.

Figure 5.17 Three-dimensional colour solid portraying the Munsell Colour Space
Unknown, *Munsell Colour Space*, undated. Accessed 5 November, 2019. <https://munsell.com/about-munsell-color/how-color-notation-works/munsell-color-space-and-solid/>

Figure 5.18 Two-dimensional vector concept of colour mixing (left);
Figure 5.19 An example of how colours transit to one another (right).
In Ng, Woon Lam. *Practical Applications of Color Theory & Design Concepts*. Singapore: 2016.

Figure 5.20 Close up of mangosteen of *Durians and Mangosteens* (left);
Figure 5.21 Colour palette of *Durians and Mangosteens* (right). Photo: Goh Huiying

Compared to the first four paintings used in this case study, the above two paintings on tropical fruits consisted of a wider range of hues and more chromatic colours were used. The high chroma of the subject matter (tropical fruits) possibly contributed to Chen's change of usage in colours. Chen believed that a true painting was one which was able to capture the appearance and the physicality of the subject matter.²⁰⁹ It would be a natural occurrence that Chen started using higher chroma colours in his paintings when the subjects were more vibrant in colours.

During the Japanese Occupation period (1942-1945), when the Japanese occupied Singapore (then Malaya) for three years and eight months, all art activities in Singapore ceased. The SOCA's President Tschang Ju Chi and Vice-president Ho Kwong Yew and several of SOCA members were taken away and killed during the Japanese Occupation.²¹⁰ Liu Kang was appointed the first President after SOCA resumed its activities after the war in 1946 and both him and Chen Chong Swee took turns on the President and Vice-President post between 1954 and 1974.²¹¹ In 1949, the Singapore Art Society (SAS) founded by leaders from different institutions namely: Richard Walker, Charles Sulisbury, Francis Thomas, Liu Kang, C.A. Gibson-Hill, Roy Morell, Phyllis MacKenzie, Suri bin Mohyani and Tok Khoo Seng.²¹² SAS was formed with the objectives to "foster the practice and appreciation of art and to raise the quality of art in Singapore, to promote the exchange of art between Singapore and other countries and to create learning and exhibition opportunities for artists" and was known for its

²⁰⁹ Kwok, "Chen Chong Swee : His Thoughts."

²¹⁰ Zongrui Chen, "A Brief History of the Society of Chinese Artists," in *Unfettered Ink : The Writings of Chen Chong Swee = Miao Bi Dan Qing : Chen Zhongrui Wen Ji*, ed. Sze Wee Low and Grace Tng (National Gallery Singapore, 2017).

²¹¹ SOCA, *65th Anniversary Exhibition Art Works of the Society of Chinese Artists 中华美术研究会 65 周年作品集*. Pg 32-37

²¹² *Revisiting History, Visualising the Future. The Singapore Art Society Art Exhibition 2019 Singapore Bicentennial Edition. 1949-2019 Singapore Art Society Artists' Directory.*, (Singapore: The Singapore Art Society, 2019). Pg 34

multiracial artists' membership.²¹³ Chen Chong Swee served as the Vice-President of SAS between 1964 and 1966.²¹⁴

²¹³ Ibid. Pg 34

²¹⁴ Chen et al. Pg 195

1950-60s: Establishing Nanyang colours

It was almost twenty years after Chen Chong Swee moved to Singapore since 1934. Compared to his earlier works in the 1930s, Chen started to use more vibrant and juicy colours in his paintings. The following set of paintings, which consisted of watercolour, oil and Chinese ink paintings were done between 1952 to 1954 (Fig 5.24-26). More chromatic colours from the opposite side of the colour wheel were used in each painting. Despite being completed during the same period of time, all three paintings reflected significant differences in the choice and control of colours. The two water medium paintings (Figure 5.24-25) reflected a lack of transitional colours where the more chromatic colours were segmented from one another (refer to Fig 5.27). The oil painting (Figure 5.26) on the other hand, lacked higher chromatic colours, and the overall painting was a little dark. The above observations could be caused by the physical strength and limitation of each medium. Below is a table which listed the properties of oil, watercolour and Chinese ink medium (Figure 5.22).

	Oil	Watercolour	Chinese Ink
Medium/Solvent	Oil	Water	Water
Surface	Canvas/Wood board	Watercolour paper	Rice paper
Techniques	Shapes	Shapes	Lines
Painting process	Layers (sketch, background, foreground)	Layers (pencil sketch, first wash, details)	Outline to wash
Limitations/ Restrictions	Long drying time. Details cannot be added when the base is wet	No white paints allowed. White spaces has to be preserved	No changes allowed. Paper tears easily

Figure 5.22 Table of the properties of various art mediums

Figure 5.23 Chen, Chong Swee. *Pilgrimage*, Oil on canvas, 50 x 70cm, 1952. Private collection. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.24 Chen, Chong Swee. *Storytelling*, Watercolour on paper, 44 x 57cm, 1952. Collection of Mr and Mrs Tan Wee Lee. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.25 Chen, Chong Swee. *Harvest*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 135 x 69cm, 1954. Collection of Mr and Mrs Tan Wee Lee. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.26 Close up of disjointed colours in *Storytelling* (top),
Figure 5.27 Close up of disjointed colours in *Harvest* (bottom)

The long drying process when using oil paint can be both a limitation or strength. For the surface of an oil painting to be dried before subsequent layers can be added on without blending with the wet layers, it takes varied time depending on the size of the painting, the thickness of paint application, the humidity of the room etc. Small brush size details can hardly be added on an oil painting that has a wet base. However, the long drying time allows multiple painting amendments such as the blending of hard edges and reapplication of paints. This characteristic makes oil a versatile painting medium compared to Chinese ink and watercolour where the paper surface absorbs the paint pigments and get trapped in the paper fibres (refer to Figure 5.32-34 for examples of how blue-sky is done in different mediums). Despite the versatility in the oil medium, the result of low chromatic colours in *Harvest* could be due to the material limitation: an overmixing of tube paints (Figure 5.28). Fresh out-of-tube unmixed paints

appeared to be more chromatic than mixed paints. For example, the colour orange that is squeezed freshly out of the tubed paint appears to be more vibrant compared to the orange that is mixed from colour yellow and red (refer to Figure 5.29). The colour appeared more chromatic because fresh out-of-tube paints are of one particle size. When more than one tubed paint is mixed, the particle sizes are different and caused an uneven surface (refer to Figure 5.30-31), resulting the colour mixture to appear dull (less chromatic) when light scattered in different directions.²¹⁵

Figure 5.28 Close up of the muted colours in *Pilgrimage*

Figure 5.29 Mixed paint (left-hand side orange) versus fresh out-of-tube paint (right-hand side orange)
Photo: Goh Huiying.

²¹⁵ Woon Lam Ng, *Practical Applications of Color Theory & Design Concepts* (2016). Pg 37

Figure 5.30 Regular particle size of Pigment A.

In Ng, Woon Lam. *Practical Applications of Color Theory & Design Concepts*. Singapore: 2016.

Figure 5.31 Particle size differences of Pigment A and Pigment B caused an uneven surface

In Ng, Woon Lam. *Practical Applications of Color Theory & Design Concepts*. Singapore: 2016.

Watercolour, on the other hand, have another set of limitation and strength. An essential aspect in water-based mediums is the paper. Commonly used watercolour papers ones are: coarse-grain paper or rough, medium-grain or semi-rough and fine-grain paper.²¹⁶ Rough grain paper comes with a bumpy surface while hot-pressed paper is smooth. Rough grain paper has a strong tooth and is good at trapping pigments. Hot-pressed paper, on the other hand, has a smooth surface and is faster at drying paints. To straighten the surface, fine-grain paper is pressed while hot.²¹⁷ Cold-pressed paper is in between the two and hence is the most commonly used watercolour paper.

²¹⁶ JosÈ Marlà ParramÛn, *The Complete Book of Watercolour : The History, Materials, Techniques, Theory and Practice of Watercolour* (London: Phaidon, 1993). Pg 58

²¹⁷ Ibid. Pg 58

Figure 5.32 Example of a sky and cloud painting in oil.
Goh, Huiying, *Blue sky and green grass field*, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm, 2019.

Figure 5.33 Example of a sky and cloud painting in watercolour.
Goh, Huiying, *Singapore Cricket Club*, watercolour, 38 x 56 cm, 2016.

Figure 5.34 Example of a sky and cloud painting in Chinese ink.
Goh, Huiying, *Blue sky and green grass field*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 95 x 95 cm, 2019.

In watercolour, the two principal methods are: wet-on-dry and wet-on-wet.²¹⁸ After the first wash of paints is applied, a second layer is added on while the paper surface is still wet. This quick addition of paints resulted a soft blending of wet-on-wet edges or a repulsing effect called bloom where the water molecules pushed the paint particles away.²¹⁹ When the brush contained more water than the surface of the paper, bloom effect will be created (Figure 5.35). This creation of bloom is due to the physical property when wet pigments are applied on paper. The water molecules of the additional water from the brush travelled outwards and brought the paint particles with it, leaving a watermark know as a ‘bloom’. Figure 5.36 shows a three-step diagram on how the water molecules (black dots) travel when a brush loaded with paint (red dots) is applied on the surface.

Figure 5.35 Example of bloom effect (left) and wet-on-wet painting method (right).
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.36 Three-step diagram to show how the molecules travel.

In Coates, Stephen. *The Watercolour Enigma: A Complete Painting Course Revealing the Secrets and Science of Watercolour*. UK: Search Press Limited, 2018.

²¹⁸ Stephen Coates, *The Watercolour Enigma : A Complete Painting Course Revealing the Secrets and Science of Watercolour* (UK: Search Press Limited, 2018). Pg 17

²¹⁹ Ibid. Pg 12-14

Another water-based medium, Chinese ink painting used rice paper which are commonly made from rice straw fibers. It is much thinner and highly absorbent as compared to watercolour paper, which is made by 100% cotton fibers and able to support the paint pigments on the surface. Two kinds of rice paper widely used in Chinese ink painting are: sized (*shouxuan* 熟宣) and unsized (*shengxuan* 生宣). Ms Xie from the Chinese painting and calligraphy material shop *sibaozhai* 四宝斋 at Bras Basah Complex shared that the pioneer artists used unsized paper for freestyle painting (*xieyi* 写意) and sized paper for meticulous painting (*gongbi* 工笔). It was also not uncommon for them to paint on lower grade papers such as rice paper with mixed grass (*caodi zhi* 槽底纸) and bamboo paper (*yukou zhi* 玉扣纸).²²⁰ Different from unsized paper, sized paper is coated with size from alum and glue from animal or fish bone during the paper making process.²²¹ As unsized paper is more absorbent, when ink is painted on the paper surface, it runs easily and created a bleeding effect (Figure 5.37).

Figure 5.37 Example of how ink bleed on the different rice papers; sized (left) and unsized (right).
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Other than being used as examples to illustrate the properties of different painting mediums, these three paintings, *Pilgrimage*, *Storytelling* and *Harvest*, which were done between 1952 and 1954, were selected as they reflected Chen Chong Swee's weakness in human construction.

²²⁰ Personal interview with Ms Xie from *sibaozhai* arts gallery located at Bras Basah Complex on 27 November 2019.

²²¹ Briessen. Pg 183-184

The facial features of the characters in *Storytelling* were ambiguous and not drawn in details. The human figures in *Harvest* were drawn with brief brush strokes, and some of the body proportions were done inaccurately. In *Pilgrimage*, the facial features were kept to minimal and the focus was placed at the depiction of human figures in action. In the discussion of Western painting techniques, these three paintings would be seen as paintings done with low mastery of human anatomy, which should be further improved.

However, if examined using Chinese painting principles, all three paintings became skilled pieces of artwork which accurately reflected the characters' ethnicity, culture and level of society in 1950s Singapore and Bali. They fulfilled the third principle in Xie He's *Six Principles of Chinese Painting*: "The third: Reflection of (To conform with) the objects; that is, the depiction of forms."²²² In traditional Chinese painting, figure paintings were not equivalent to portraits in Western painting. Little value was placed on individualism and some figure or facial features might even bear remarkable resemblance from one another.²²³ More than often, traditional Chinese figure paintings seek to comment on the level of society that the figure was representing and not a realistic representation of the person.²²⁴ The painted human figures of Chinese men dressed in singlets or bare-chested indicated the tropical temperature of Singapore. The Balinese women revealing their breasts and them in labour reflected the culture and role of women in Bali (refer to Figure 5.38-39 for photos of these activities taken in the 1950-60s).

²²² Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles. Part 1: The First Millennium*, 1. Pg 5

²²³ Sophia Suk-mun Law and Tony Blishen, *Reading Chinese Painting: Beyond Forms and Colors : A Comparative Approach to Art Appreciation* (2016). Pg 54-55

²²⁴ Ibid. Pg 57

Figure 5.38 Photograph of storytelling at the Singapore River in the 1960s
Photo: courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Figure 5.39 Photographs of Balinese women in their traditional costumes and at work.
Photo: courtesy of National Gallery Archives.

The 1950-60s period also marked an important milestone in the discussion of Singapore pioneer artists. In 1953, Chen Chong Swee, along with Liu Kang, Cheong Sooi Peng and Chen Wen-Hsi embarked the legendary Bali trip, which was often regarded as the watershed event by historians on the writing of Nanyang style. During the trip, Chen did numerous sketches and took photographs as painting references.²²⁵ The four artists spent three months in Bali to make preliminary studies.²²⁶ In 1954, a year after the Bali trip, the four artists held a group

²²⁵ National Gallery Chen Chong Swee's archive RC-S1-CCS. Accessed on 27 November 2019.

²²⁶ "Bali- by 4 Chinese Artists."

exhibition which displayed more than 100 paintings, including Chen's oil painting *Pilgrimage* (Fig 5.23).²²⁷

Chen believed that one should “read myriad books and travel myriad miles.”²²⁸ Between 1952 to 1974, Chen made multiple overseas painting trips to countries such as: Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Nepal and China.²²⁹ Senior artist Low Puay Hua, who painted alongside with Chen Chong Swee in the 1960s, shared that Chen’s watercolour paintings were either completed on the spot or done in the studio with photo and sketch references. Sometimes Chen would complete 60% of the painting on-the-spot and touch up the rest in the studio.²³⁰ Chen left behind a large number of sketchbooks which included rough drawings of sceneries, buildings, close studies of animals and humans in daily activities.²³¹

Figure 5.40 Chen Chong Swee’s travel photo, unknown, undated.
Photo: courtesy of National Gallery Archives

²²⁷ Kang Liu et al., "Bali 峇厘旅行画集," (Singapore 1953).

²²⁸ Chen et al. Pg 97

²²⁹ *Chen Chong Swee : A Legacy in Truth Goodness and Beauty : An Exhibition and Publication That Commemorates the Centenary of the Artist's Birth*. Pg 102

²³⁰ Personal interview with Low Puay Hua on 1 December 2019. View transcript in Appendix 5.3.

²³¹ National Gallery Chen Chong Swee’s archive RC-S1-CCS. Accessed on 27 November 2019.

Figure 5.41 Chen Chong Swee's sketchbook, unknown, undated.

Photo: courtesy of National Gallery Archives (left);

Figure 5.42 Chen Chong Swee's sketch of the Malay fishing village, unknown, undated.

Photo: courtesy of National Gallery Archives (right).

The below two watercolour paintings were of sceneries from Malacca, Malaya (then Malaysia).

When painting a scene with strong sunlight, the overall value of the painting should consist of more white tones compared to black tones.²³² The amount of white and black tones in the painting was calculated based on the frequency of luminance (on a greyscaled image) using a digital image analyser. Figure 5.44 showed a generated histogram that revealed the brightness level (horizontal) of *Church of St Paul, Malacca* plotted against the amount of pixels (vertical).

²³² Woon Lam Ng, "Tonal Design : A Mathematical Guide in Constructing Mood and Weather," *The International Journal of Design Education* (2020).

Figure 5.43 Chen, Chong Swee. *Church of St Paul, Malacca*, Watercolour on paper, 77 x 56cm, 1955.
In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.44 Histogram²³³ of *Church of St Paul, Malacca*
(tones on x-axis and the amount of pixels for each colour on y-axis)

The x-axis represented brightness, with black tones on the left, grey tones in the middle and white tones on the right. The y-axis represented the amount of pixels. The generated histogram of *Church of St Paul, Malacca* reflected Chen's accuracy in capturing the lighting condition where strong sunlight casted prominent shadows onto the walls (Figure 5.44). There was a balanced amount of black and white tones reading in the generated histogram. A night painting, on the other hand, would reflect a histogram with a higher reading for black tones and lower white tones (refer to Figure 5.45 for the histogram of *Storytelling*).

Figure 5.45 Histogram of *Storytelling*
(tones on x-axis and the amount of pixels for each colour on y-axis)

²³³ The luminance is computed for each pixel with the formula $0.2126*R+0.7152*G+0.0722*B$ (ITU BT.709). <https://www.dcode.fr/image-histogram>. Accessed on 12 December 2019.

In another watercolour painting that was done in 1961, *Drying Fish* portrayed the daily activities of the fishermen under strong sunlight. Figure 5.47 showed a generated histogram of *Drying Fish* which had a higher reading of white tones and lower black tones. As shared in Chen Chong Swee's writing, he believed that the aesthetic of Western painting lay on capturing the light and shadow of the place, which evolved around logic and realism.

Figure 5.46 Chen, Chong Swee. *Drying Fish*, Watercolour on paper, 74 x 54cm, 1961. Collection of Mr and Mrs Tan Wee Lee. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.47 Histogram of *Drying Fish*.
(tones on x-axis and the amount of pixels for each colour on y-axis)

In terms of colour usage, *Drying Fish* reflected an excellent use of transitional colours (greys and browns) to balance up the high chromatic colours used on the human figures and blue water (refer to Figure 5.48 for the re-enacted colour palette).

Figure 5.48 Close-up of *Drying Fish* (left) and reenacted colour palette (right). Photo: Goh Huiying.

In the foreword for a collection of Leong Joon Wong's watercolours, Chen Chong Swee shared that watercolour painting was often seen as a draft and was not taken seriously because "to most people, oil painting is the pinnacle of Western painting."²³⁴ However, Chen noticed that many young Singaporean artists tend to prefer to paint in watercolour. This preference could be due to the similarity shared between watercolour and Chinese ink. The agility of watercolour medium also made the capturing of rapid weather changes possible.²³⁵ In 1969, together with 12 other watercolour artists, Chen founded the Singapore Watercolour Society (SWS). The SWS founding members painted on location along the Singapore River on every Sunday.²³⁶ Chen held various key positions throughout the years and was elected the President of SWS between 1973 and 1974.²³⁷

²³⁴ Chen et al. Pg 101

²³⁵ Ibid. Pg 101

²³⁶ Singapore Watercolour Society SWS, *Singapore Watercolour Society 50th Annual Exhibition— Singapore Expressions 新加坡风* (Singapore2019). Pg 310

²³⁷ Personal interview with SWS President Seah Kang Chui on 5 May 2019.

1970s and beyond: Singapore's pioneer artist

Chen Chong Swee retired from the Chinese High School and NAFA in 1971 and 1975 respectively.²³⁸ After his retirement from the teaching posts, Chen continued to contribute to the local art communities. Chen accepted the invitation to serve as a member of the National Day Art Exhibition Selection Committee, which he served from 1970 to 1981, and started to serve as an advisor to NAFA, Singapore Teachers Art & Craft Association and the San Yi Finger Painting Society.²³⁹ During this period, Chen continued to travel overseas for painting trips and remained an active participant in local art exhibitions.

The following 3 paintings that were done between 1971 and 1972.

Figure 5.49 Chen, Chong Swee. *Under the Frangipani Tree*, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 67 x 99 cm, 1972. Collection of Mr and Mrs Chen Chi Sing. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

²³⁸ Chen et al. Pg 206

²³⁹ Ibid. Pg 207

Figure 5.50 Chen, Chong Swee. *Fisherman*, Oil on Masonite board, 59 x 88 cm, 1971.
In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Figure 5.51 Chen, Chong Swee. *Sunflowers*, Watercolour on paper, 76 x 104 cm, 1971. Collection of Mr and Mrs Chen Chi Sing. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

These paintings were completed between the year 1971 and 1972. They reflected Chen's maturity in the understanding how to use colours and the concept behind colour. Similar to the paintings in the 1960s, Chen managed to balance and control the chromatic colours with the good use of transitional colours such as brown and grey.

Figure 5.52 Close-up of *Under the Frangipani Tree* (left) and reenacted colour palette (right).
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.53 Close-up of *Fisherman* (left) and reenacted colour palette (right).
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.54 Close-up of *Sunflowers* (left) and reenacted colour palette (right).
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Other than colours, Chen's understanding of human anatomy and foreshortening had also improved. His drawing of the bending women in *Under the Frangipani Tree* was done with high accuracy (Figure 5.55). His sketchbook had sketches of women picking up the frangipani flowers (Figure 5.56). It could be a sketch that was drawn from life observation, or a drawing practice referenced from photographs in preparation for the creation of *Under the Frangipani Tree*.

Figure 5.55 Foreshortening breakdown of the human figures in *Under the Frangipani Tree*.
Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.56 Sketches of human characters from Chen Chong Swee's sketchbook.
Photo: courtesy of National Gallery Archives.

When discussing about principles of Chinese painting, Chen often emphasised on the importance of pictorial composition. In *Six Principles* by Xie He, the fifth principle was about well-planned composition²⁴⁰ where the coherency and interconnectivity of the elements in the painting were important considerations. A balanced layout could create visual harmony while an imbalanced layout would create visual tension.²⁴¹ These three paintings which was done in either Chinese or Western medium reflected an excellent use of “open-and-close” (*kaihe* 开合). The negative and positive spaces among the various elements were well arranged to create a balanced layout and visual harmony, which aligned with the storytelling and intention of these paintings (refer to Figure 5.57-59).

Figure 5.57 Balanced layout in *Under the Frangipani Tree*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

²⁴⁰ Refer to Appendix 4.2 for the English translations and original Chinese text of Xie He's *Six Principles*.

²⁴¹ For more writings on visual tension, see Rudolf Arnheim, "Dynamics," in *Art and Visual Perception : A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Figure 5.58 Balanced layout in *Fisherman*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.59 Balanced layout in *Sunflowers*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

These three paintings done in the 1970s also reflected that Chen Chong Swee had fully developed the concept of colour application where all three qualities of colours: hue, value and chroma had been achieved and well handled. A noticeable difference was these paintings had a wider colour space as compared to the earlier paintings (compare Figure 5.60-62 with Figure 5.11-12). Chen used more chromatic colours with a bigger hue difference in these paintings.

Figure 5.60 Data plotted 3D Munsell colour space of *Under the Frangipani Tree*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.61 Data plotted 3D Munsell colour space of *Fisherman*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 5.62 Data plotted 3D Munsell colour space of *Sunflowers*. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Findings from the investigation

Since the early paintings in 1930s, Chen had reflected a strong understanding of tonal values and shown proficiency in capturing realistic lighting, which were unique principles from Western painting. Chen used the principles of Western and Chinese painting interchangeably and creatively according to the narrative of the story. Comparing his paintings from the three periods: 1930-40s *South-Seas in the Eye of the New Immigrant Artist*, 1950-60s *Establishing Nanyang Colours*, and 1970-80s *Singapore's Pioneer Artist*; Chen's use of colours transformed from low chromatic to high chromatic colours. In the three qualities of colours: hue, value and chroma, Chen first mastered the control of values. In his early paintings, Chen reflected a good understanding of values and controlling of analogous (neighbouring) colours. This understanding on values could be due to his training in Chinese ink painting. When he first started using more chromatic colours in the 1940-50s, the lack of use of transitional colours made the paintings looked disjointed. This problem was less evident in paintings that were done through life observation, such as *Durians and Mangosteen* (Figure 5.14). On paintings that were done in a studio setting and painted from memory or reference photos, for example, *Storytelling* (Figure 5.24) and *Harvest* (Figure 5.25), each colour was painted in isolation without transitional colours to connect the highly chromatic colours. By 1960-70s, on paintings such as *Drying Fish* (Figure 5.46) and *Fisherman* (Figure 5.50), Chen's paintings reflected a good understanding in all three qualities of colour: hue, value and chroma.

Due to the limitations of the materials used in Chinese ink painting and the principles of Chinese painting, Chen Chong Swee possibly mastered the other two qualities of colours: hue and chroma, and the mixing of transitional colours when using Western paint mediums. When using Chinese ink on rice paper, unlike watercolour paper and oil canvas, the water and pigments were absorbed and trapped in the pores of the paper. The rice paper became higher in values (appear darker) when painting with a wet brush (refer to Figure 5.69). The above two

limitations of Chinese ink medium made it hard for the artist to visualise colour mixing when painting on rice paper.

Figure 5.69 Rice paper darkened by 3 tones when painted with a wet brush. Photo: Goh Huiying.

In the principles of Chinese painting, colour was not an essential component. Chen Chong Swee's paintings reflected that his art practice were heavily based from Chinese philosophies and traditions. Chinese painting, poetry and calligraphy were often known as The Three Perfections.²⁴² *Tropical Fruit* was an excellent example which showed that the inscriptions and Chinese poetry at the side of the painting were important aspects in understanding Chinese painting. They often provided context and gave a deeper or sometimes differed meaning to the painting. The inscriptions at the side of Chen's Chinese ink paintings were often composed by him. It was also a common practice for artists to inscribe on one another's paintings as a form of friendly cultural exchange. Chinese artist Xu Beihong composed and wrote the following poetry and inscription (Figure 5.70).

²⁴² Sullivan, *The Three Perfections : Chinese Painting, Poetry, and Calligraphy*.

Figure 5.70 Chen, Chong Swee. *Tropical Fruits* and the closeup of the inscription. Collection of Mr and Mrs Chen Chi Sing. In *Chen Chong Swee: A Legacy in Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Singapore: NAFA, 2011.

Tropical Fruits, Chinese ink painting which was done in 1939 had the following inscription:

“Everyone said that it is impossible to live in this warm and barren land,
But they did not account for the vicissitudes of life.
I do not place propaganda in my paintings,
But drink amongst the blossoms.

Chong Swee painted these delicious fruits and requested that Beihong inscribe this work. In the late autumn of the 28th year (of the Republic).”²⁴³

The inscription in a Chinese painting could change the viewer’s initial comprehension of the painting. For instance, in *Tropical Fruits*, the subject of the painting was a basket of fruits: mangosteens, rambutans, pineapple and banana. However, the poetry written was about Xu’s experience in Malaya (then Singapore). In 1920-30s, Malaya was often named as a “cultural desert” where, unlike China and India, there was no cultural heritage, art, architectural splendours, sculptures or music, dances and poems.²⁴⁴ Who would think that there would be blossoming art and culture on the “warm and barren land”? Between 1937 and 1941, many Chinese artists such as Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu and Xu Qian visited Malaya to hold talks and art exhibitions to raise funds to support the war efforts in China.²⁴⁵ This emphasis on art was probably why Xu wrote that he avoided propaganda message in his poetry. When analysing the importance of inscriptions in Chen’s paintings, T.K. Sabapathy said, “For Chen, it provides a means of boosting the content of the picture... For the viewer, such disclosures must come as a surprise, if not a welcome relief.”²⁴⁶ *Tropical Fruits* and its inscription were good examples that Chinese painting required a different way of comprehension. The art form or the practical colour application of the subject had minimal weightage compared to the message of the painting.

After a close examination of the 14 selected paintings, it could be concluded that Chen Chong Swee did not consciously employ Western colour theories in his painting process. Chen’s

²⁴³ Original Chinese text: 孰谓炎荒不可居，当知世事有乘除。画中岂含宣传意，万紫千红供饱饮。宗瑞写此馋涎欲滴之物属。悲鸿题之二十八年秋

²⁴⁴ Marco C.F. Hsü and Chee Kien Lai, *A Brief History of Malayan Art* (Singapore: Millenium Books, 1999). Pg 1

²⁴⁵ Yeo. Pg 95-102

²⁴⁶ T. K. Sabapathy, "Step into His World," *The Straits Times*, 8 November 1984.

writings did not reflect any comments or thoughts about the use of Western colour theories in his painting. He either did not read about colour theory or he did not see the importance in it. The Western writings on colour theories served as the theoretical framework behind the practical application of colours in the Impressionists' paintings. However, it was also possible for artists to understand the concept of colour theories through practical experience, without reading any writings on colours. It could be deduced that Chen understood the three qualities of colours and mastered the skills of colour mixing through years of practical painting experience using both Chinese and Western paint mediums.

CONCLUSION

The key research question of the thesis is how has the use of colours in Chen Chong Swee's paintings developed and changed after his resettlement in Malaya in 1932? Over the years, there is no substantial style or execution difference in Chen Chong Swee's paintings. Why is this so? He believed that "what is new today will become outdated tomorrow".²⁴⁷ He did not want to change for the sake of changing. Chen is not a stubborn painter who chose not to move out of his comfort zone. This continuity in painting style is possibly due to his roots and philosophies in Chinese traditions which are a mix of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism teachings. However, in terms of practical colour application, there is a noticeable difference in his use of colours. After a close investigation of Chen Chong Swee's selected paintings, it can be concluded that his usage of colours became vibrant over the years. Although Chen Chong Swee did not consciously employ Western colour theories on to his paintings, he did understand and used most aspects of colour theories in his paintings. In the discussion of colour theories in visual arts, there are three aspects namely: colour visual effects, colour mixing and 3D colour space (three qualities of colours: hue, value and chroma). Unlike the Post-Impressionists who read about Chevreul's theory of simultaneous contrast, Chen did not place complementary colours beside each other with a scientific reason. His paintings did not reflect a conscious use of colour placement to create colour visual effects on the viewer.

Chen Chong Swee might not have understood colour visual effects, but over the years, he mastered the other two aspects of colour theories: the three qualities of colours (3D colour space) and colour mixing. As early as the 1930s, Chen's mastery in Chinese ink painting reflected his understanding and excellent control in the use of values. His Chinese ink paintings

²⁴⁷ Chen et al. Pg 52

of the moonlight in Kampong and Malay villagers were skillfully painted and successfully captured the atmosphere of 1930s Malaya. The keys to success behind these paintings were the understanding of tonal values and the ability to construct images according to the stories behind the paintings. Chen's early paintings relied heavily on value differences in image construction. These Chinese ink paintings used analogous (neighbouring) colours, and a smaller hue range with less chromatic colours. His paintings in the 1950s were more vibrant where higher chromatic and wider hue range of colours were used. However, there was a lack of transitional brown and grey colours to link and balance the opposite colours together. The lack of transitional colours resulted a painting to look disjointed. This was especially obvious on paintings with human figures that were done without a real-life setup (e.g. Figure 5.24 *Storytelling* and Figure 5.25 *Harvest*). When painting from life, it was more natural to use colours such as brown and grey, as these colours could be observed from the setup (e.g. Figure 5.14 *Durians and Mangosteen*). By the 1970s, Chen's paintings had achieved the right balance and control of all three qualities in colours: hue, value and chroma. He also gained good control in colour mixing and started using transitional colours such as colour brown and grey to link high chromatic colours together.

The secondary research questions include how had the geographical location of Singapore and the change in subject matter affected Chen Chong Swee's use of colours? Compared to the paintings done in the 1930s, the paintings from the 1960s had wider range of hues and higher chromatic colours. As Singapore (then Malaya) experienced sunny weather throughout the year, the lighting condition of the landscape was a major visual reference to Chen, who focused on capturing the light and shadows of the scenery. The actual colour of the object, such as tropical fruits with higher chromatic colours, resulted a shift in the use of colours. This shift in the use of colours due to the change of subject matter aligned with the painting experience of the artist-

researcher (author). To better illustrate the experience, the following paragraph is written in first-person language.

When painting on location, I could observe a wider hue range from the subject, compared to painting indoors from reference photos. In Singapore, where we experience sunlight throughout the year, the white building no longer appears white when the sun is out and shining onto the walls. There are oblongs of yellow with purplish greys or orange with yellow-green in them. The opera pink of the frangipani flowers appears to be juicier and more vibrant when the sun shines on them. I often had to paint quickly to accurately capture the colours of the subject before the sun changes its position or hides behind the clouds. The hot weather tends to push us to work faster. It was a different experience when painting in Shantou, China. The weather was cooling when we went for the painting trip in November. When we were painting the temple in the village, the air was slightly damp and chilly. The cooling weather resulted a relaxing painting experience. I was no longer rushing to paint in the colours. Instead, I found myself carefully controlling the small transitions of the brown and grey colour mixtures.

Figure 6.1-6.4 are two sets of images taken in Emerald Hill, Singapore and Shantou, China respectively. The weather in Singapore is often sunny, and the direct light from the sun cast well-defined shadows on the buildings. As Singapore's location is nearer to the equator, the sunlight is stronger, and the colours appear to be more chromatic compared to the sceneries in Shantou, China. The strong sunlight resulted in the use of higher chromatic colours for the paintings of Singapore sceneries (refer to Figure 6.5-6.6 for the 3D Munsell colour space for *Penarakan Generation* and *Temple in the Village*).

Figure 6.1 Goh, Huiying. *Penerakan Generation*, watercolour, 56 x 38 cm, 2019.

Figure 6.2 Photograph taken on location at Singapore (right). Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 6.3 Goh, Huiying. *Temple in the Village*, watercolour, 38 x 56 cm, 2019.

Figure 6.4 Photograph taken on location at Shantou, China (right). Photo: Goh Huiying.

Figure 6.5 Data plotted 3D Munsell colour space of *Penerakan Generation* (left). Photo: Goh Huiying;

Figure 6.6 Data plotted 3D Munsell colour space of *Temple in the Village* (right). Photo: Goh Huiying.

The other secondary research question is how has Chen Chong Swee's training in Western painting influenced the way he did his Chinese paintings, and vice versa? Chen had used a large number of Western principles and techniques in his Chinese ink paintings. Principles such as human anatomy, fixed-pointed perspective and foreshortening were derived from Western painting techniques. To Chen, the fundamental task of an artist was to evoke emotive resonance from the viewer by letting life come through with the use of artistic skills.²⁴⁸ Quoting Chen's words "Art is essentially a skill in communicating intangible things to a third party. Works of art faithfully reflect the age and realistically portray the surroundings."²⁴⁹ Chen's Chinese paintings were studio creations composed to convey a message to his viewers. Western paintings and sketches were tools for him to exercise his ability in capturing believable human figures in actions and to realistically capture the light and shadows of the scenery. Chen's understanding of human construction improved over the years. His sketchbooks were filled with life drawings and close observations of human figures. The use of sketchbook to observe from life was uncommon in Chinese painting training since human anatomy and fixed-point perspective were principles that derived from the West. Similar to the understanding of human

²⁴⁸ Ibid. Pg 73-74

²⁴⁹ Sabapathy, "Step into His World."

construction, Chen possibly learnt about the concept of colour application when using Western painting tools and techniques. Due to the characteristics and limitations of the tools used in Chinese ink painting, it is near impossible for Chen to learn about colour mixing and understand all three qualities of colours through Chinese ink painting. This limitation in Chinese painting links to the last secondary research question on how had the mediums (Chinese painting, watercolour or oil) impacted Chen Chong Swee's painting process and/or impacted the result of the painting?

Due to the characteristics of various painting mediums, there are strengths and limitations when using each of them. Rice paper used in Chinese ink painting absorbs pigments quickly. This property makes the painting process irreversible and limits the ability of colour mixing on the paper surface. Watercolour paper, on the other hand, traps the pigments on the surface of the paper and allows more time for colour mixing. Unlike the two water-based mediums, oil painting does not work with paper surface. The oil-based paints have longer drying time, thus allowing multiple amendments. However, unintended colour mixing could happen when the colour pigments of the wet paint base are lifted and mixed with the newly applied paints. This unintended colour mixing could be one of the reasons why Chen's oil paintings were less chromatic and dull-looking compared to his watercolour paintings. After a close examination of Chen Chong Swee's paintings, writings, sketchbooks and biography, the conclusion is Chen's usage of colours and understanding of how colours mix with one another are formulated through his practical experience in Western painting. Together with his foundation in Chinese painting and art beliefs which were based on Chinese traditions, Chen Chong Swee created communicable imageries of local subject matter with the blend of Western painting techniques and Chinese tradition.

Contributions of Chen Chong Swee as a Singapore's pioneer artist

As a Singapore pioneer artist, Chen did not just leave behind paintings that recorded the Malay villagers or Kampongs of Singapore (then Malaya), more importantly, he showed that opposing art techniques and philosophies could be combined and used together. Chen used Xie He's *Six Principles* as his guiding principles when working on Chinese ink paintings. However, these Chinese principles did not restrict or prevent him from using Western painting techniques on his Chinese ink paintings. Depending on the story of the painting, Chen used Western and Chinese painting techniques interchangeably. To Chen, the role as an artist was to make use of his artistic skills to convey his stories to the viewers through his paintings.

As an educator and active key member in the art community, Chen not only shared his skills, but also passed on his art beliefs and Chinese traditions. He encouraged the younger generations of artists to remain hardworking and keep striving to improve their artistic skills. When asked to write the preface message for the 19th batch of NAFA graduation magazine, Chen shared the old idiom: "All skyscrapers are built from the ground up".²⁵⁰ He reminded and encouraged all graduating students that the success in art did not come from luck, but by laying a strong foundation with hard work. Chen believed that an artist should focus on his intellectual development, uphold ethical values and hold responsibilities in reflecting the realities of his surroundings in his artwork. Chen Chong Swee had a strong sense of responsibility on the role of an artist and he rejected self-gratification, which was a common primary impulse for creativity in modern art. He once shared, "If art is merely the development of a personal style, then it becomes meaningless and even worthless."²⁵¹ Chen's strong and passionate art belief

²⁵⁰ Chen et al. Pg 21-22

²⁵¹ Sabapathy, "Step into His World."

served as the inspiration for the practical component. In the following segment, first-person's language was used to better express the rationale behind these 8 paintings.

Impact of Chen Chong Swee's painting and art beliefs on the artist-researcher

As a Singaporean artist who does traditional paintings, I always feel disconnected from my peers and the contemporary art market. After attending art school, I had learnt to appreciate artwork that focused on conceptualisation and not technical execution. However, creating conceptualised artwork is never a calling for me. Unlike many of my peers, I do not see traditional paintings as a craft that just focus on hand skills and painting techniques. There are more to it, but I could not explain them. In the course of this research, I read through Chen Chong Swee's published writings and felt aligned with his art beliefs. Chen believed that art should be a form of communicable imagery and embodied "truth, goodness and beauty" (*zhenshanmei* 真善美).²⁵² A piece of artwork communicates a story with the viewer. It is also important to keep working on one's art foundation such as drawing and painting skills. Having good artistic skills allow messages to be conveyed to the viewer accurately. It is also perfectly normal to paint traditional landscape paintings. Since art and life are inseparable, it is natural that we produce paintings that reflect our environment, culture and society. This research journey has answered some of my deepest queries-- why am I so different from my peers? I learnt that it is perfectly alright that I continue to walk my path. I should not change for the sake of changing as "what is new today will become outdated tomorrow".²⁵³ Chen's art beliefs and practice reassured me to continue to paint representational paintings, which is the overall stylistic choice for the practical component.

²⁵² Chen et al. Pg 73. Truth, goodness and beauty describe the high moral of a man who is truthful in his actions and mind, and spiritually beautiful at heart.

²⁵³ Ibid. Pg 52

In the last segment, 8 paintings created in the process of the thesis investigation will be presented. Out of the 8 paintings in the practical component, 3 of them are done in Chinese ink. Despite having a foundation in Chinese calligraphy, I have not attempted to paint in Chinese ink. It could be because I first started learning Western painting when I was young, and felt a lack of confidence in attempting Chinese painting. After reading Chen's preface for his student, where he mentioned that many of the younger generation Malayan (current Singapore and West Malaysia) artists had learnt Western art before learning Chinese painting,²⁵⁴ I feel encouraged to try out Chinese ink painting. Through this investigation, I had gained a good understanding of the principles in Chinese painting, it is a good time to start painting using Chinese ink.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. Pg 29

6.1 Practical Component B: 8 paintings by Artist-Researcher

This segment consists of 8 paintings done in Chinese ink, watercolour and oil paint. These paintings are inspired by Chen Chong Swee's art beliefs and Chinese traditions. Chen often questioned, what is art? What should the role of an artist be? How will art be like in the next 50 years? These 8 paintings served as a response from a Singaporean artist, who grew up in post-colonial era and was trained under Singapore's art education system. In order to communicate the story to the viewer accurately, there is a heavy thought process in the image construction and the usage of colours in these paintings.

In relation to the thesis' research questions, these paintings reflected that the change of geographical location did impact the use of colours in a painting. The 4 watercolour landscape paintings, which were done in Shantou, China and Singapore respectively, reflected a different usage of colours due to the differences in geographical location and lighting condition. The paintings done in Singapore used higher chromatic colours and a wider range of hues. Whereas the paintings that were done in China used analogous colours and a smaller range of hues. These paintings also showed the strengths and limitations of each medium. For instance, due to the properties of rice paper, the brushstrokes would remain visible in Chinese ink paintings. It also limited the precision and blending of colours. Watercolour painting, on the other hand, encouraged the mixing of colours on the surface of the paper. The medium allowed layering of colours which provided an accurate portrayal of light and shadows. Unlike the water mediums, oil painting was done on a primed canvas. The white and highlights in an oil painting were painted in, whereas in watercolour and Chinese ink, the areas with white and highlights had to be left unpainted. By mastering the properties of each painting medium, one could better create communicable imageries to the viewer.

1. Today's Paradise

Figure 6.7 Goh, Huiying. *Today's Paradise* 今日之桃花源, 95 X 95cm, Chinese ink, 2019. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Note from artist-researcher:

Inspired by Chen Chong Swee's poetry, *Today's Paradise* (*jinri zhi taohuayuan* 今日之桃花源). This painting recorded multiple perspectives and different moment in time when I was taking a walk along the Esplanade coast area. To me, Singapore, a city with good infrastructure, security and prosperity, is indeed a paradise—a land of peach blossom. Just like the happy and contented villagers in the Kampong, Singaporeans' political apathy is probably what it meant

by ignorance is bliss. Why should anyone judge and comment that it is wrong to lead a life this way? Clerical script (*lishu* 隶书) was used in the inscriptions and the calligraphy followed the strokes of the inscriptions from Chen Chong Swee's Chinese painting *Landscape* that was done in 1963.

English translations of inscriptions (poetry by Chen Chong Swee)²⁵⁵:

“Today's paradise, the new Land Of Peach Blossoms.

The land is flat and vast, with houses aligned in order. The field is fertile and well irrigated, mulberries and bamboos grow. Pathways are interconnected. People are contented and happy know nothing of the outside world, neither the matters of the Han nor latter Wei and Jin dynasties. If the governor from Tao Yuanming's *The Record of the Land of Peach Blossoms* had not been enthusiastic and Mr Liu had not ventured into the described paradise by chance, if they had instead been born in present times, how few are the earthly hours they would have spent locating this land of today's paradise.

In the *gengshen* year (1980), Chong Swee in Singapore.”

Original Chinese text:

“今日之桃花源。

土地平旷，屋舍俨然。有良田、美池、桑竹之属。阡陌交通，怡然自乐。不知有汉，无论魏晋。太守还多事，刘子无问津，倘生于今世，星球绕月少几回矣。

庚申宗瑞于星洲。”

²⁵⁵ From Chen et al. Pg 137

2. *Today's Kampong*

Figure 6.8 Goh, Huiying. *Today's Kampong* 今日甘榜, 76 X 38 cm, Chinese ink, 2019. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Note from artist-researcher:

In the 1940s, Chen Chong Swee painted a series of Malay Kampongs in Chinese ink. They were records of his surroundings and how he viewed Singapore (then Malaya) as a new immigrant. Born in the 1980s, I grew up living in HDB flats. “Kampong” (Malay village) became a historical and nostalgic term that we hear from our parents or see it in television shows. Any sight of live poultries in metropolitan Singapore became a surreal experience that worth a pictorial record. The combination of roaming chicken family and intriguing shophouses is my interpretation of today’s kampong in Singapore. Fixed-eye perspective was used in this painting to represent the snap of a moment. The hanging scroll provided a vertical format to record the 100 year old tree and the roaming chicken family. Semi-cursive regular script (*xingkai* 行楷) was selected to be used for the inscriptions, followed by a positive carved (*yangke* 阳刻) red seal in the white space.

3. New Year

Figure 6.9 Goh, Huiying. *New Year* 爆竹一声一岁除, 38 X 76 cm, Chinese ink painting, 2019. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Note from artist-researcher:

Chinese New Year celebrations had always been an important occasion in my family. The act of spring cleaning, cooking, baking and decorating the house symbolised the anticipation of welcoming a fresh start as a family. Memories fade. I wanted to record the sense of fulfilment and happiness that I experienced during the Chinese New Year celebrations. This is an imaginary scene that took place in the living room of my grandmother's place. Growing up, with both my parents working, I spent most of my time with my grandparents. It was an enjoyable childhood living in a big household with parents, grandparents and uncles, with occasional visits from aunts and cousins over the weekends. This scene could be an imagined dreamscape, or Deja vu of a far future. Fish-eye lens perspective was used to capture the full length of the living room and figures in action. The poetry inscription was written in Clerical script (*lishu* 隶书) at the white space on the right hand side of the painting. The red seal was chopped at the bottom right to bring balance to the composition.

English translations of inscriptions (Chinese poetry *New Year's Day* by Norther Song poet Wang Anshi):²⁵⁶

Amid the boom of firecrackers a year has come to an end,

And the spring wind has wafted warm breath to the wine.

While the rising sun shines over each and every household,

People would put up new peachwood charm for the old.

Original Chinese text: 王安石《元日》爆竹声中一岁除，春风送暖入屠苏。千门万户曈曈日，总把新桃换旧符。

²⁵⁶ English translations from <https://www.hanbridgemandarin.com/article/chinese-learning-tips/2018-chinese-spring-festival>. Accessed on 9 January 2020.

4. *Sunny Morning Along Mohd Sultan Road*

Figure 6.10 Goh, Huiying. *Sunny Morning Along Mohd Sultan Road*, 38 X 56 cm, Watercolour, 2020. Photo: Goh Huiying.

5. *Geylang*

Figure 6.11 Goh, Huiying. *Geylang*, 38 X 56 cm, Watercolour, 2020. Photo: Goh Huiying.

6. *Shantou, China*

Figure 6.12 Goh, Huiying. *Shophouses in Shantou*, 38 X 56 cm, Watercolour, 2018.

Photo: Goh Huiying.

7. *Shantou, China*

Figure 6.13 Goh, Huiying. *China Village*, 38 X 56 cm, Watercolour, 2018. Photo: Goh Huiying.

8. *Blue Sky White Clouds Green Grass Field*

Figure 6.14 Goh, Huiying. *Blue Sky White Clouds Green Grass Field* 蓝天白云绿草地, 91 X 122 cm, Oil on canvas, 2019. Photo: Goh Huiying.

Practical component B serves as a response to Chen Chong Swee's queries on the definition of art or the role of an artist, as well as reminding the artist-researcher/author that there are great responsibilities as a Singaporean artist living in the 21st century. The physical landscape of Singapore has been everchanging since the birth of the nation. However, there are new factors which are changing the cultural landscape in Singapore, such as the growing gap between the old and new generation of Singaporeans in terms of language and culture upbringing, the overpowering influence from the West on political mentality, and the gradual loss of Chinese traditions such as moral and social values from Confucian. As an artist and a researcher living in the change of an era, there is much to be done.

This thesis seeks to fill the gap of current literature where there is a lack of writing on the analysis of practical colour application in Nanyang paintings. The research methodology of practice-led research and the role of the artist-researcher allows a thorough investigation of the painting process of the selected paintings and contributes the experience of a practitioner to the field of visual arts research. The science behind colour theories serves as the theoretical framework in the case study chapter and analysis tools such as 3D colour space generator and histogram charts open up possibilities of using engineering tools for visual arts analysis.

GLOSSARY OF COLOUR TERMS²⁵⁷

Additive Primaries

Red, Green, and Blue light. Combining all three additive primaries at 100% intensity produces white light. Combined them at varying intensities produces a gamut of different colours. Combining two primaries at 100% produces a subtractive primary: 100% Red + 100% Green = Yellow, 100% Red + 100% Blue = Magenta, 100% Green + 100% Blue = Cyan.

Analogous colours

Any set of three or five colours that are closely related in hue and usually found next to each other on the colour wheel- such as blue, blue-green and green.

Chroma

Attribute of colour used in the Munsell Colour System to indicate the degree of departure from a grey of the same value. Correlates with dimension of saturation; the further from the axis, the purer the colour.

CIE (International Commission on Illumination)

The International Commission on Illumination (usually abbreviated CIE for its French name, Commission Internationale de l'Eclairage) is the international authority on light, illumination, colour, and colour spaces. It was established in 1913 as a successor to the Commission Internationale de Photométrie and is today based in Vienna, Austria.

Colour Space

A three-dimensional mathematical model that includes all possible colours. The parts of the visible spectrum that can be reproduced, such as RGB for computer monitors, CMYK for print and web safe index colours for the web.

Complimentary Colours

Two colours that, when combined, create neutral grey. On a colour wheel, complements are directly opposite the axis from each other, such as blue - yellow, red - green, etc.

Histogram

A graphical representation of the tonal values (brightness or colour) in a scene based upon the frequency of occurrence of each value.

Hue

The attribute of colour used in the Munsell Colour System by which we distinguish red from green, blue from yellow, and so forth.

²⁵⁷ From <https://www.xrite.com/learning-color-education/other-resources/glossary>. Accessed on 14 January 2020.

Subtractive Primaries

Cyan, magenta and yellow. Theoretically, when all three subtractive primaries are combined at 100% on white paper, black is produced. When these are combined at varying intensities, a gamut of different colours is produced. Combining two primaries at 100% produces an additive primary, either red, green or blue.

Tint

To mix white pigment with absorbing (generally chromatic) colourants. Also, the colour produced by mixing white pigment with absorbing (generally chromatic) colorants. The resulting mixture is lighter and less saturated than the colour without the white added.

Value

An attribute of colour used in the Munsell colour system to indicate the lightness of a specimen viewed in daylight, on a scale from 0 for the ideal black to 10 for ideal white, in steps that are visually approximately equal in magnitude.

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APPENDIX 1.1 BIOGRAPHY AND PORTFOLIO OF ARTIST-RESEARCHER

Born in 1987, Goh Huiying is a Singaporean artist who does traditional paintings using various mediums such as watercolour, oil and Chinese ink. She started learning western painting at the age of 10 from Yap Tay Soon, former graduate of NAFA Diploma in Western Arts.²⁵⁸ She is also an active member of Singapore art societies and groups such as the Singapore Watercolour Society, Singapore Art Society, Hui Ann Association art and calligraphy group and Young Artists' Club. Currently holding the office position of Secretary-General in the Singapore Watercolour Society (SWS), Goh recently chaired the publication committee of the 300-pages SWS 50th Anniversary commemorative magazine.

Art Activities

2019: Singapore Art Society Annual Exhibition 2019 at ION Orchard, Singapore

2018: 27th Asia Watercolour Exhibition at Qujing Art Museum in Yunnan Province, China

2018: Singapore Watercolour Society 49th Annual Exhibition "Rejoice with Watercolour" at Hwa Chong Cultural Centre Exhibition Hall, Singapore

2017: Silk Road: China tribal groups Southeast Asia Tour at NTU Chinese Heritage Centre, Singapore

2017: Shantou-Singapore cultural exchange and Watercolour Joint Exhibition at Shantou, China

2016: Dr Tan Tsze Chor Art Exhibition 2016(Western Arts) by Singapore Art Society at MCI Building, Singapore

2016: Still life and Portrait Art Exhibition by Singapore Federation of Art at the Visual Arts Centre, Singapore

²⁵⁸ Yap Tay Soon completed his Diploma in Western Arts with NAFA in the 1970s where he studied under Lim Yew Kuan and Lai Foong Mui. Also a former graduate of The Chinese High School, Yap received his formative art training from pioneer artists Chen Chong Swee and Chen Wen-Hsi.

Paintings by artist-researcher/author

Active member in the local art community

APPENDIX 2.1 LIM HAK TAI'S SIX MANIFESTOES FOR NAFA

*English translations by Low Sze Wee*²⁵⁹

1. Fusion of cultures of the different races
2. Bridging of Eastern and Western art
3. Diffusion of the scientific spirit and social thinking of the 20th century
4. Reflection of the needs of the people of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore
5. Expression of local tropical flavour
6. Fulfillment of educational and social needs

*Original Chinese text by Lim Hak Tai*²⁶⁰

1. 融合各族文化风尚。
2. 沟通东西艺术。
3. 发挥二十世纪科学精神，社会思潮。
4. 反映本邦人民大众需求。
5. 表现当地热带情调。
6. 配合教育意义，社会功能。

²⁵⁹ From Low, "Lim Hak Tai— Art and Life." Pg 37

²⁶⁰ Lim, Hak Tai, "Preface" "The Art of Young Malaysians 南洋青年美术."

APPENDIX 3.1 COLOUR QUALITIES OF MUNSELL COLOUR THEORY²⁶¹

The three colour qualities are hue, value and chroma.

HUE is the name of a colour.

Hue is the quality by which we distinguish one colour from another, as a red from a yellow, a green, a blue, or a purple. This names the hue but does not tell whether it is light or dark, weak or strong, leaving us in doubt as to its value and its chroma.

Science attributes this quality to difference in the length of ether waves impinging on the retina, which causes the sensation of colour. The wave length M. 5269 gives a sensation of green, while M. 6867 gives a sensation of red.

VALUE is the light of a colour.

Value is the quality by which we distinguish a light colour from a dark one. Colour values are loosely called tints and shades, but the terms are frequently misapplied. A tint should be a light value, and a shade should be darker; but the word "shade" has become a general term for any sort of colour, so that a shade of yellow may prove to be lighter than a tint of blue. A photometric scale of value places all colors in relation to the extremes of white and black but cannot describe their hue or their chroma.

Science describes this quality as due to difference in the height or amplitude of ether waves impinging on the retina. Small amplitudes of the wave lengths given in paragraph 21 produce the sensation of dark green and dark red: larger amplitudes give the sensation of lighter green and lighter red.

CHROMA is the strength of a colour.

²⁶¹ From Munsell, *A Color Notation*. Pg 18-20

Chroma is the quality by which we distinguish a strong colour from a weak one. To say that a rug is strong in colour gives no hint of its hues or values, only its chromas. Loss of chroma is loosely called fading, but this word is frequently used to include changes of value and hue. Take two autumn leaves, identical in colour, and expose one to the weather, while the other is waxed and pressed in a book. Soon the exposed leaf fades into a neutral grey, while the protected one preserves its strong chroma almost intact. If, in fading, the leaf does not change its hue or its value, there is only a loss of chroma, but the fading process is more likely to induce some change of the other two qualities. Fading, however, cannot define these changes. Science describes chroma as the purity of one wave length separated from all others. Other wave lengths, intermingling, make its chroma less pure. A beam of day light can combine all wave lengths in such balance as to give the sensation of whiteness, because no single wave is in excess.

The colour sphere (see Fig. 1) is a convenient model to illustrate these three qualities: hue, value, and chroma, and unite them by measured scales. The north pole of the colour sphere is white, and the south pole black. Value or luminosity of colours ranges between these two extremes. This is the vertical scale, to be memorized as V, the initial for both value and vertical. Vertical movement through colour may thus be thought of as a change of value, but not as a change of hue or of chroma. Hues of colour are spread around the equator of the sphere. This is a horizontal scale, memorized as H, the initial for both hue and horizontal. Horizontal movement around the colour solid is thus thought of as a change of hue but not of value or of chroma.

A line inward from the strong surface hues to the neutral grey axis, traces the greying of each colour, which is loss of chroma, and conversely a line beginning with neutral grey at the vertical axis and becoming more and more coloured until it passes outside the sphere, is a scale of chroma, which is memorized as C, the initial both for chroma and center. Thus, the sphere lends its three dimensions to colour description, and a colour applied anywhere within, without, or on its surface is located and named by its degree of hue, of value, and of chroma. HUES first appeal to the child, VALUES next, and CHROMAS last.

APPENDIX 4.1 SELECTED CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA HISTORY²⁶²

10,000 BC	Early Neolithic cultures.
1600 BC	Shang dynasty (to c. 1050 BC).
1050 BC	Zhou dynasty (to 256 BC), Western Zhou dynasty (to 771 BC).
c.479 BC	Death of Confucius.
403 BC	Warring States period (to 221 BC).
286 BC	Death of Zhuangzi (b. 396 BC).
221 BC	Qin unifies China. First Emperor undertakes massive projects (to 210 BC).
213 BC	Burning of Confucian books.
206 BC	Han dynasty (to AD 220), Former or Western Han dynasty (to AD 9).
25	Later of Eastern Han dynasty (to 220).
618	Tang dynasty (to 907).
843	Suppression of Buddhism (to 845).
960	Song dynasty (to 1276). Northern Song dynasty (to 1126).
1127	Southern Song dynasty in south (to 1276).
1276	Mongol Yuan dynasty gains control of south China.
1368	Ming dynasty (to 1644).
1644	Manchu Qing dynasty (to 1911).
1894	Sino-Japanese War (1895).
1911	Qing dynasty overthrown by revolutionaries.
1919	May Fourth protests in Tiananmen Square against Versailles Treaty.
1927	Nationalist period (to 1949). Jiang Jieshi leader.
1947	Civil War between Nationalists and Communists (to 1949).
1949	People's Republic of China founded. Mao Zedong leader.

²⁶² From Ebrey. Pg 338

APPENDIX 4.2 SIX PRINCIPLES BY XIE HE

English translations by Osvald Sirén²⁶³

The first: Reverberation of the life-breath; that is, the creation of movement.

The second: Bone-method; that is, the (proper) use of the brush.

The third: Reflection of (To conform with) the objects; that is, the depiction of forms.

The fourth: Deference to types; that is, the application of colours.

The fifth: The layout of the design; that is, the arrangement of positions.

The sixth: Transmission and perpetuation; that is, the copying of (old) models.

Original Chinese text by Xie He²⁶⁴

谢赫六法

一、气韵生动是也；

二、骨法用笔是也；

三、应物象形是也；

四、随类赋彩是也；

五、经营位置是也；

六、传移模写是也。

²⁶³ English translation from Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles. Part 1: The First Millennium*, 1. Pg. 5

²⁶⁴ Xie He, *Gu Hua Pin Lu*, Southern Qi dynasty. 谢赫《古画品录》南齐.

APPENDIX 5.1 CHEN CHONG SWEE'S BIOLOGICAL TIMELINE²⁶⁵

- 1910 Chen Chong Swee is born on 5 October 1910 in Chenghai county, Shantou city, Guangdong province, China.
- 1920 Travels from Bangkok to Tuopu, his grandfather's town of residence in Shantou, to attend primary school. Concurrently, he receives lessons in Chinese classical studies from Chen Longqing, a scholar in a neighbouring village. This lays a strong foundation for his later practice of Chinese literature and poetry.
- 1929 Graduates from the fine arts department of Union High School in July.
- 1931 Graduates from Xinhua Academy of Fine Arts in January.
Leaves China for southern ports of Asia, arriving in Singapore in September.
- 1932 Arrives in Penang (then part of the Straits Settlements) and begins teaching at Jit Sin Chinese Public School in July.
- 1935 Arrives and settles in Singapore.
Co-founds the Society of Chinese Artists (formerly the Salon Art Society) with largely alumni of Shanghainese art academies.
During the Sino-Japanese War, artists travel from China to Singapore to hold fundraising exhibitions and participate in activities organised by the Society.
During this time, Chen becomes friends with Xu Beihong.
- c. 1935 Begins teaching art at Tao Nan School.
- 1937 Begins teaching art at Tuan Mong School in January.
- 1950 Participates in *1st Annual Exhibition of Works by Local Artists*, a group exhibition presented by the Singapore Art Society.
- 1951 Begins teaching art at Chung Cheng High School.
Participates in *Exhibition of Works by Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen-Hsi and Cheong Soo Pieng*, a group exhibition presented by the Singapore Art Society.
- c. 1951 Becomes a lecturer in the Chinese ink painting department at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

²⁶⁵ Selected key events from Chen et al. Pg 200-208

- 1952 Goes on a painting expedition in Indonesia between 8 June and 27 July, together with Chen Wen-Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and Liu Kang. They pass through Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya en route to Bali, arriving on 23 June.
- c. 1952 Leaves his post at Tuan Mong School and begins teaching at The Chinese High School.
- 1953 Participates in *Four Artists to Bali*, a group exhibition featuring works inspired by the 1952 Bali trip and held at the British Council, Singapore 7-15 November.
- 1954 First appointed Vice President of the Society of Chinese Artists. He is appointed the same position in 1958, 1964 and 1972.
Begins teaching art at Tuan Mong High School in January.
Travels with other artists including Chen Wen-Hsi to Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Cameron Highlands for a painting trip between December 1954 and January 1955.
- 1955 Leaves his post at Chung Cheng High School in December.
- 1956 First appointed President of the Society of Chinese Artists. He is appointed the same position in 1959, 1961-1963 and 1974.
Leaves his post at Tuan Mong High School in December.
- 1960 Travels to the east coast of Malaysia for a painting trip in April, visiting Kelantan, Trengganu and Kuantan, among other places. Other artists, namely Chen Wen-Hsi, Chua Mia Tee and Lee Boon Wang, join him on this trip.
- 1964 The Ministry of Education uses Chen's articles on art as teaching material for a portion of the Higher School Certificate General Paper syllabus (Chinese).
Appointed Vice President of the Singapore Art Society, and retains this position until 1966.
- 1965 Awarded the Public Service Star (Bintang Bakti Masyarakat) on 13 November by the first President of the Republic of Singapore, Yusof Ishak, for his contribution to the visual arts in Singapore.
- 1969 Co-founds the Singapore Watercolour Society on 18 August with 12 other watercolourists, including Gog Sing Hooi, Lim Cheng Hoe and Loy Chye Chuan.
- 1970 Invited to serve as a member of the National Day Art Exhibition Selection Committee, and does so until 1981.

- 1971 Travels to India and Nepal for a painting trip in April.
- 1972 Serves as an advisor to the Life Art Society, and does so till the 1980s. During this period, he also acts as advisor to the San Yi Finger Painting Society, Singapore Teachers Art & Craft Association and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.
- 1974 Embarks on a painting trip to China with other artists in September, visiting Guangzhou, Guilin, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, Wuxi, Xi'an, Luoyang and Beijing. The trip is co-led by Liu Kang and Huang Pao Fang.
- 1975 Retires from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.
- 1983 Publishes *The Paintings of Chen Chong Swee* in collaboration with his son, Chi Sing. The book features 143 of Chen's works.
- 1984 221 of Chen's works are exhibited in Chen Chong Swee Retrospective, an exhibition jointly presented by the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum, Singapore, and held at the National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore, 3-18 November. This is the first and only solo exhibition held in Chen's lifetime.
- 1985 Passes away on 15 February 1985 in Singapore, aged 75.

APPENDIX 5.2 LETTER FROM SINGAPORE ART SOCIETY

Letter from the Honorary Secretary of the Singapore Art Society (SAS) to Chen Chong Swee to invite him to have an exhibition of his paintings which would be sponsored by SAS.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Letter from the Honorary Secretary of SAS to Chen Chong Swee dated 20 January 1959. From <https://roots.sg/learn/collections/listing/1084153>. Accessed on 25 November 2019.

APPENDIX 5.3 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH LOW PUAY HUA

Text interview with senior artist Mr Low Puay Hua on 1 December 2019

Goh Huiying: Hi Mr Low! I am currently writing a thesis on colour theory, which uses Chen Chong Swee's paintings as the case study. I would like to ask, do you remember whether Chen Chong Swee's watercolour works were sketched on-site or created in the studio? The materials I flipped through in the archives showed that he made many sketches on his sketchbooks. When he goes out to sketch, he brings a camera to take reference materials.

Low Puay Hua: It depends on the content of the painting. Some are on-site painting while some were painted in the studio. Some are done 60% in the outdoors and completed the rest at home. These could be traced and understood from the artwork.

Goh Huiying: I understand now, thank you! My thesis analysed Chen Chong Swee's paintings to understand his concept of colour application and how his use of colours has changed since he moved to Singapore from China. And if this is related to the tropical scenery of the Nanyang.

Low Puay Hua: Although he came from southern China, he has painted Nanyang scenery and Nanyang characters very early in his life. His oil paintings, watercolours, and Chinese ink paintings are good reflections of this. These are representations of the Nanyang landscape. It's not what that some people said, "Nanyang style".

Goh Huiying: Well, my thesis mainly studies the colour usage of his paintings and focused on his artwork. I would not be debating what is "Nanyang style" or whether Chen Chong Swee is considered as part of the Nanyang painting school. Thank you very much, Mr Low!

吴慧盈：刘前辈好！我现在正在书写关于色彩学的硕士论文，其中引用了陈宗瑞的作品做为研究。想请教一下，您可否记得，陈宗瑞的水彩作品是现场写生还是室内创作呢？我在美术馆翻看的资料显示，他拥有大量的素描画本。出外写生是也都带着相机拍摄参考资料。

刘培和：要看画作品内容，有的是现场写生，有的是回家才画，也有的是外画百分之六十回家再修画。从作品中能多少理解。

吴慧盈：明白。谢谢！我的论文主要是以他的作品来解析南来后色彩用法是否有改变。而这是否又和南洋热带风景有关？

刘培和：他虽然是从中国南方来，但他很早就有画南洋景色风景和南洋人物的。从他的油画，水彩，水墨画都能体现出来，而这些是表现南洋景观。不是有些人口水的什么，南洋风格。

吴慧盈：嗯，论文主要是研究他的作品色彩用法，而不是像历史学家或记者去讨论什么是南洋风格，或陈宗瑞是不是算南洋画派。感谢前辈的分享！